

Taming the Tongue (lesson #6)

James 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12

Policemen & military personnel often wear or carry powerful guns & ammunition; **such people** must have a keen sense of responsibility.

None of us would want to see powerful instruments put into the hands of foolish, immature or irresponsible people.

But every one of us carries & wields another powerful instrument every day.

The tongue has great potential for *good* or *evil*:

- 1) It can give life (**Prov 15:4, 23; 18:21**).
- 2) It can destroy (**Psa 58:4; 140:3; Rom 3:13; Psa 5:9**).

We must maintain a keen sense of responsibility for the use of our tongues, as a policeman or a soldier does for the use of his weapon.

Psalms 39:1 (David) – I said, “I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.”

1. No words can be spoken that are not first in the **heart**?

(**Matt 12:34-37 – Matt 15:18-20**)

Therefore, Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (**Matt 5:8**).

2. How do teachers “receive a stricter judgment”?

Is this a “stricter judgment” from men or God?

Could be rendered “greater condemnation” or “heavier judgment”.

Teachers are looked to as examples—therefore the potential for good or evil may have more impact on the lives of others—their lives affect the eternal destiny of others (1 Tim 4:12-16).

This is not intended to discourage Christian men from public teaching, but is meant to exhort them, who so aspire, to do their work with pure motives & careful restraint over their tongues.

In teaching the gospel there is always potential for as much harm as good.

In public teaching of the gospel there will always be the temptation for some to put their own selfish will before the will of God.

Some temptations that draw power from the tongue:

- 1) Love for preeminence (3 Jn 9-10)
- 2) Swaying of personal loyalties by flattery & deceit (Rom 16:18; Gal 4:17)
- 3) Displaying worldly wisdom (1 Cor 2:4, 13)
- 4) Teaching falsehoods for personal gain (2 Thess 2:10-12; 2 Pet 2:1-3)

3. What difficult thing can a person do if he can control his tongue?

He should be able to control his entire body (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Cor 10:5).

4. What is the similarity between a horse's bit, & ship's rudder & the tongue?

Small instruments are able to control large bodies or vessels.

This illustrates the power of the tongue to control our behavior.

When does a person become a Gossip? Opinionated? Liar? Sower of discord? False teacher?

WHEN THE TONGUE IS UNLEASHED!

James 3:6-7 – And the tongue is a *fire*, a *world of iniquity*. The tongue is so set among our members that *it defiles the whole body*, & *sets on fire the course of nature*; & it is *set on fire by hell*.

5. Explain the analogies of the tongue being:

a. “A fire”

Barnes: In this sense, that it produces a “blaze,” or a great conflagration (inferno or fire). It produces a disturbance & an agitation that may be compared with the conflagration (forest fire) often produced by a spark.

pur (poor); “fire” (literally or figuratively, specifically, lightning):

b. “A world of iniquity”

Barnes: “A little world of evil in itself. ...all kinds of evil that are in the world are exhibited there in miniature; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth.”

c. “So set among our members that it defiles the whole body”

Barnes: “It occupies a position & relation so important in respect to every part of our moral frame, that there is no portion which is not affected by it.”

d. "Sets on fire the course (wheel) of nature"

Barnes: "The more literal sense would be that which refers to an individual: the wheel of birth-that is, the wheel which is set in motion at birth, & which runs on through life; but perhaps the apostle meant to speak in a popular sense, & thought of the affairs of the world as they roll on from age to age, as all enkindled by the tongue, keeping the world in a constant blaze of excitement."

Clarke: "James does not intend to express the whole circle of human affairs, so much affected by the tongue of man; but rather the penal wheel of the Greeks, & not unknown to the Jews, on which they were accustomed to extend criminals, to induce them to confess, or to punish them for crimes; under which wheels, fire was often placed to add to their torments.

Genesis (NT:1078) often signifies life, then the wheel of life will signify the miseries & torments of life. To set on fire the wheel of life is to increase a man's torments;

Clark adds: It is true, however, that the rabbis use to term gilgal (OT:1536) towl^adowt (OT:8435), "the wheel of generations," to mark the successive generations of men & it is possible that James might refer to this as if he had said: "**The tongue has been the instrument of confusion & misery through all the ages of the world.**" But the other interpretations more likely."

e. "Set on fire by hell"

Barnes: "Hell, or Gehenna, is a place where the fires continually burn. The idea here is, that that which causes the tongue to do so much evil derives its origin from hell & is unrelenting in its influence."

f. "Unruly evil"

Barnes: "An evil without restraint, to which no certain & effectual check can be applied."

g. “Full of deadly poison”

Barnes: “That is, it acts on the happiness of man, & on the peace of society, as poison does on the human frame. The allusion here seems to be to the bite of a venomous reptile” (Psa 140:3; Rom 3:13).

6. Why are animals mentioned in this context?

UNLIKE THE TONGUE, man is able to subdue & control the animal life; to some extent, the tongue will always be wild & undomesticated.

7. How is the tongue inconsistent?

We bless & curse others with it.

8. Is it natural for the tongue to be inconsistent?

Not anymore natural than for a spring to issue both fresh & bitter or salt water, or for a fig tree to bear olives, or for a grapevine to bear figs.

To misuse the tongue is to use it in a manner that goes against its nature, or against the purpose for which it was made (cf. Rom 1:26; 6:12-13).

9. What kind of judging is forbidden? (Matt 7:1-5; not righteous judgment, Jn 7:24)

The same type of judging used against Christ, which is a judgment stemming from impure motives & improper attitudes.

To talk someone down, to disparage;

To speak of others in a way calculated to lower them in other people's estimation.

To speak of them in their absence, when they have no opportunity to defend themselves or correct untrue or inaccurate statements.

To backbite: hurtful, injurious words inflicted on a person behind his back

Four questions to test proper use of the tongue (Rotary International):

- 1) Is it the truth?
- 2) Is it fair to all concerned?
- 3) Will it bring good will & better friendship?
- 4) Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Quote: *"There is so much bad in the best of us, & so much good in the worst of us, that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us."*

10. How does an improper judgment reflect upon the one(s) doing it?

One sets himself forth as a lawgiver & judge, which will have the effect of actually lowering that person in the esteem of others.

This is why we have to be careful about making disparaging remarks against the beliefs of other people. **WE MUST POINT THEM TO THE WORD!**

11. What kind of swearing is James forbidding? (Matt 26:63-64; Heb 6:13-14; 1 Thess 5:27)

Foolish oaths, which created a distinction between binding & non-binding oaths or promises

Furthermore, we should never feel compelled to certify our every word with an oath (Eph 4:25).

Phrases like “*God is my witness*” – “*Before God*” – “*Goodness knows*” can easily become expressions with very little meaning attached to them when used for every ordinary happening in life.

12. Did Jesus rebuke the Jews of His day on this matter?

Jesus called it hypocrisy (Matt 23:16-22).

13. How may one “fall into judgment” if he does not speak properly?

KJV – “**condemnation**” is krisis (kree'-sis); decision (subjectively or objectively, for or against); by extension, a tribunal; by implication, justice (especially, divine law):

It depicts one being brought before a court of justice on charges.

(Matt 12:36-37) – “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, & by your words you will be condemned.”