

Tongue Talk



Words

Have you taken time to notice
The power within words,
How God the Father spoke
Into existence our whole world?

The seas, the stars, the plants, the birds,
All by spoken word were made,
Bringing glory to the Father for
The foundation He had laid.

For unto man was given
The ability to speak,
To understand the Father
And for His will to seek.

We've used its great potential
To build up and to tear down.
We've not guarded their progression
And are surprised by what we've found.

Our words can injure others,
Or bring to them great pain.
Yes, they're often used unwisely
And can bring us great shame.

But when bridled by the Spirit,
There control we all can find.
Bringing glory to the Father,
And to us great peace of mind.

Proverbs 21:23: “He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.”

“A biblical writer said, ‘The tongue can no man tame.’ A Greek philosopher asked his servant to provide the best dish possible. The servant prepared a dish of tongue, saying, ‘It is the best of all dishes, because with it we may bless and communicate happiness, dispel sorrow, remove despair, cheer the faint-hearted, inspire the discouraged, and say a hundred other things to uplift mankind.’ Later, the philosopher asked his servant to provide the worst dish of which he could think. A dish of tongue appeared on the table. The servant said, ‘It is the worst, because with it we may curse and break human hearts; destroy reputations; promote discord and strife; set families, communities, and nations at war with each other’ He was a wise servant. Solomon said, ‘Who so keepeth his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble.’”

—J. Witcomb Brougher

In chapter 3, James now shifts our focus to the human tongue—its dangers, its impact, its ability to bless and curse, its ability to corrupt, its ability to comfort or to promote combat. The tongue can do all these things and more. It reflects the condition of your heart. It shows us what things are important to us and what we believe. As we begin our study this week, take time to examine what your tongue tells you about yourself.

Read James 3:1-12.

“Let not many [of you] become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” Here James is warning fellow Christians about the accountability incurred by those who become teachers. What a teacher learns and presents has a significant effect on not only themselves, but also on those whom they teach. Therefore, teaching carries with it a stricter judgment.

It is a grave responsibility to preach or teach the Word of God and accurately present the word of truth. Errors in this arena are significant. Matthew 18:6-8 warns: “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of

the sea. Woe to the world because of [its] stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”

Every teacher should strive to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Notice James does not say “you” will incur stricter judgment but “we.” He was intimately aware that every teacher of the Word falls into this special category of accountability.

For we all stumble in many ways. Everyone falls short of, or fails to do, what is morally correct. We all stumble. “There is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10.) James goes on to say, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”

There are two lines of thought possible in this verse. One is that of absolute perfection. No one but Christ was “a perfect man,” so if this is the case, it is obviously a hypothetical statement. However, it could mean complete and mature, in which case the evidence of that maturity would be manifest in one’s righteous speech. John MacArthur states in his commentary, “the idea is that only spiritually mature believers can control their tongues, to the degree that our holiness approaches that of Christ’s, to that degree we are spiritually perfect.”

But take a look at James’ next statement: “able to bridle the whole body as well.” In other words, if one is able to bridle the tongue, the most difficult part of the body to control, then controlling the body follows. How can this be done? This can be done with and through the Holy Spirit’s ever-increasing control of our lives.

James then provides two analogies. The first is placing a bit in a horse’s mouth. When the bit is placed in a horse’s mouth it lies on its tongue. Attaching it to the bridle and the reins permits the rider to direct the movement of the horse by manipulation of the reins. By controlling the horse’s mouth, we can control the whole horse and direct its entire body.

The second analogy is that of a ship. Ships, especially ocean-going vessels, are very large. They are tossed about at sea by storms, wind, and waves. In comparison to their massive hulls, the rudder that steers them is quite small. But even being quite small, it is still able to direct the movement of a massive ship wherever the pilot desires. Similarly, our tongues have the ability to direct or control our lives for better or for worse.

Read the various characteristics given to the tongue in the next few verses:

- It is a small part of the body, yet boasts great things.
- A great forest can be set aflame by a small fire. The tongue is a fire.

- It is the very world of iniquity. It is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body.
- It sets on fire the course of our lives and is set on fire by hell.
- No one can tame it.
- It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

For something so small, it can surely have an impact on us.

What does all this mean to us? First of all, it means that our natural tendency to boast or brag is not a gift but something we should avoid. Boasting often brings with it broken relationships, divisions in our churches, or breaking down someone else to make us look good. Our words should be encouraging words, words that build up, words that promote healing. They should be spoken under control of the Holy Spirit and not out of control in response to our selfish desires.

Secondly, the scope and ability of the tongue to destroy is reflected in the fire analogy. Forest fires that encompass hundreds or thousands of acres can be started by one small spark or one tiny match. They will continue to burn until there is no more fuel, oxygen, or heat. What an illustration of destruction. A forest fire consumes everything in its path. Plants, animals, people, and property can all be laid waste in its wake.

We then have four things listed that graphically illustrate the tongue's capability to destroy:

- 1. First**, it is the very world of iniquity. Its world is that of evil, rebellion, deception, and every form of sin. It selfishly vents on those around us releasing the pressure while destroying any person in the vicinity. No other body part can cause as much pain as the tongue.
- 2. Second**, it is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body. Its actions permeate our body and our lives. Defiling passions can be kindled by it, drawing the body into sin and guilt. It spreads and contaminates the entire body.
- 3. Third**, the tongue sets on fire the course of our lives. How many times in your life have you said something you came to regret? How many arguments have been fueled and kindled by your tongue? How many times have we used our tongues to demean someone, or to damage someone, or to destroy someone? How much misery can an out-of-control tongue bring to our lives? Every one of us

could describe an event or two that would answer these questions. Our tongues definitely have a direct impact on our lives.

4. Fourth, it is set on fire by hell. Our tongue can be a tool used by Satan. Its ability to destroy is immense. Its ability to corrupt is immeasurable. It should be no surprise that it is one of Satan's favorite tools.

We have been able to tame all the animals on the planet, yet we have been unable to tame the tongue. No one can tame it. It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. No human being has the capability to tame the tongue without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Even believers must be vigilant and constantly on guard to control their tongues. The greatest danger in the church today lies within its walls. Whether from false prophets, false teaching, or division, the source is the same—the tongue. It is like a caged animal which, if left unguarded, will jump out of its cage to accomplish its destruction.

Listen to the comparisons the next few verses provide. “With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men which have been made in the image and likeness of God.” It is a hypocritical little beast that often knows what it is doing. It is willing to do anything to achieve its goal. “From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing.” The event which comes to my mind is Peter's denial of Christ in Matthew 26:71-75: “And when he had gone out to the gateway, another [servant-girl] saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ And again he denied [it] with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’ And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you too are [one] of them; for the way you talk gives you away.’ Then he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man!’ And immediately a cock crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Jesus later heals Peter's wounds with words of encouragement and love. James' response to his brethren is, “these things ought not to be this way.” There should be no place in a Christian's life for dual vocabularies, or unrestrained responses, or uncontrolled outbursts. They do not bring honor to God, and they defile us.

In typically poignant form, James closes this line of thought with three more illustrations. First, “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?” Second, “Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives or a vine produce figs?” Third, “Neither can saltwater produce fresh.” The emphatic answer to all his questions is obviously not! A filthy, corrupted heart will produce a filthy, corrupted tongue, which will produce a filthy, corrupted life.

Thank God, we have been given the capability through the Holy Spirit to control our tongue. As you already know, it will always be a struggle, but we must fight the fight.

“Undoubtedly, some of the older boys and girls have studied cancellation in school. But there is another kind of cancellation that can be used by the youth of all ages. For example, two boys were speaking of another boy: ‘He’s slow at games,’ one said. ‘Yes,’ replied the other, ‘but he always plays fair’ ‘He is so stupid at school,’ said the first boy. ‘But he always studies hard,’ answered the second. Thus, every unkind word spoken by the first boy was cancelled by a kind word from the second. Suppose the next time you hear an unkind word, you try to cancel it by putting a kind one in its place.”

Gospel Herald

WEEKLY WALK

No one has ever existed that has not had to fight the battle of the tongue. Everyone has problems with it. If we say we don’t, we probably have a much larger problem than we know. Why? Because we have not taken time to take a look at how we speak to others or how our words impact others. Do you think before you speak or speak before you think? Do you use words that hurt versus heal? How can we honor God by the way we speak? What can we do to improve in this area? That is the topic and focus for this week.

Monday-Take some time today to re-read James 3:1-12. List below the things you learn about the tongue. How does your tongue compare to the descriptions in these verses?

Tuesday-Today, keep track of what you say and how you say it. Pay particular attention to those times when your words may be harsh or hurtful. Why did they come out that way? To whom were they addressed? How can you improve in this area?

Wednesday-Are there people in your life with whom you have problems? Have the problems been caused by, or increased, because of the words possibly being spoken in anger or frustration, or without thinking? If so, today is the day to use healing words to mend them, remembering to never return evil for evil but to overcome evil with good.

Thursday-Keep track of your words today. Are your words mostly constructive used to build people up or are they destructive, causing pain and problems? How can you improve in this area so that others see Christ in your speech?

Friday-Today, examine whom and what you talk about, including the words used in your conversations. Do your conversations often revolve around people? Are your words condemning, judgmental, and hurtful? If so, re-read verses 9 and 10 and take action to stop it, now. If not, take time to praise God for the people He has placed in your life.

Saturday-Take time today to tell those around you how much you love them. Tell them how much they mean to you and bring out those qualities you particularly admire. Make it a goal to tell those in your family something genuinely positive every day.

Sunday-Attend church. Speaking of words, have you talked about going to church? Have you said to yourself, "I'll go next week."? In that case, this is next week. Get to church. If you have not, go anyway!