

UNFORK YOUR TONGUE Sunday School- February 23, 2014

Unifying Topic: CONTROL YOUR SPEECH

Lesson Text

I. A Teaching Tongue (James 3:1-2)

II. Taming The Tongue (James 3:3-8)

III. A Forked Tongue (James 3:9-12)

The Main Thought: Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. (James 3:10, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Often people speak without thinking about the impact their words will have on others. How can Christians be sure that their words will benefit those who hear them? James speaks of justice within the context of controlling a person's tongue because both blessings and curses can come from the same mouth.

Lesson Aim: To stress the importance of controlling one's words and being aware of how words can be used to harm others.

Life aim: To have Christians understand how important what we say is to God.

- 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
- 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.
- 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.
- 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.
- 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!
- 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.
- 3:7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:
- 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.
- 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.
- 3:11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?
- 3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

HISTORY:

¹James addresses the relationship between faith and works, especially the folly of professing faith when unaccompanied by works. Using several examples to make his point, including those of Abraham the friend of God and Rahab the harlot, James declares three times that faith without works is dead (2:14-26).

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter begins a new discussion—the temptation and trials common to all, but especially to teachers. Teachers are pointed out as being especially subject to the sins of the tongue (3:1-12) and to misunderstanding true wisdom (3:13-18).

LESSON:

James 3:1-2 A Teaching Tongue

3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. Apparently the churches to which James was writing had too many men who were self-appointed teachers or "Masters." James cautions those who would be leaders to examine their motives; possibly speaking to the Jews who wanted to teach the newcomers to the faith. Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in the Jewish culture. Many Jews who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers. James warned them that although it is good to aspire to teach, the teachers' responsibility is great because their words affect other spiritual lives. There is a warning to all teachers and James includes himself when he says "we". They must show by their lives the truth that they teach.

A Quaker proverb says "Let your life speak verses Let your lives preach."

Another one says: "Of your unspoken words you are the master, of your spoken words the servant, and of your written words the slave."

Therefore, our speech will be severely judged, whether we're a preacher, teacher or a believer, it will be judged! It would be easy and wrong to speak great words but fail to do what they have taught. There should not be a large number of teachers, who are not ready to follow, for they shall receive the greater condemnation. God holds them to a higher

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/ja2/ja2_02.htm

standard for what they teach than others do.

3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Here, we are referring to our speech; offending others with our tongue. The tongue stumbles and sins often; stumbles in word after word. How does scripture say this? Let's take a look. Is your tongue always showing that we are...

- not bragging
- not provoked
- not speaking any evil thoughts
- not gossiping
- are we always speaking kindly
- always rejoicing in truth
- always saying wholesome words etc?

Only one thing that can be said: how short we are of the glory of God! The tongue shows us that we are always stumbling and coming short. Therefore, we must learn to control the tongue. God wants us to know that if we don't offend in word, we are mature men, able to bridle the whole body.

- A person's maturity can be measured by the control of his tongue.
- A person can learn to control any passion or appetite of the body by learning to control the tongue.

That's why James admonishes us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. Shocking isn't it? In other words, James is saying "*a loose tongue, betrays a loose life*" and "*actions speak louder than words.*" The tongue has to submit to the fruit of the Spirit, which is self-control.

James 3:3-8 Taming The Tongue

3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. James gives two analogies of comparing the tongue to...

1. A horse's bridle. The bit or bridle in the horse's mouth may seem small compared to the size of the horse, and appear trivial, however, the animal obeys as it is directed as the bit turns the whole body of the horse.

3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

2. A ship's rudder. The rudder or helm guides, steers, and controls the ship through fierce winds and storms, turning it by the smallest of objects compared to the ship itself, wherever the captain wants it to go.

The bit and the rudder needed a master to take control of them; so does the tongue need a master to take charge of the tongue. To work properly and accomplish good things, both bit and rudder must be under the control of a strong hand that knows how to use them properly. In the same way, the tongue must overcome the contrary force of the flesh and be under God's wise control if it is to accomplish anything good.

3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!—Comparing these two analogies, we see the tongue is also a small member of the body, but what an enormous damage it can do. It has enormous power to boast great things. A person can boast about anything and he can boast in a quiet, unassuming way or boast by talking big. But no matter how the boasting is done, it is destructive: it either lowers the image of a person in the eyes of others because of his boasting or makes the listener feel inferior or less of a person than the boaster. Boasting is nothing more than vain or empty talk, but its destructive force must never be underestimated.

The word "*matter*" (*hulen*) means wood or a forest, hence the matter or raw material of a thing (*Marvin Vincent, Word Studies In The New Testament, Vol.1, Grand Rapids, Mich: eerdmans, 1969, p.7471*). Therefore, the meaning is that a great forest is set on fire by only a little spark. So it is with the tongue.

3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. The reason the tongue need a master is because it is a fire; not that it can become; it says it is a fire! And it can set a whole forest of lives and relationships on fire, consuming and destroying all that lies in its path. It is a world of iniquity; it can cause what seems to be a world of sin and destruction when it is set ablaze.

- a marriage destroyed
- children disturbed
- friendships damaged
- reputations ruined
- wars fought
- fights aroused
- injuries caused
- bodies maimed
- promotions denied

The tongue defiles the whole body and sets on fire the whole course of a man's nature of life. The phrase "*the course of nature*" (*ton trochon geneseos*) is a descriptive phrase meaning in the Greek, "*the wheel of nature, the wheel of life, the unending span of life stretching from birth to death*" (*A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol.6, p.43*). Therefore, the tongue can do just what this verse says: pollute and dirty a man's whole body and life, the whole wheel of his life. How? – Through the expression of our words or someone else's words. Name the sin and words are involved. Note the source of a fiery tongue: Hell. Satan himself is the igniter of a fiery tongue. Therefore, any person who sets his tongue ablaze is following the tongue of Satan, of the fire of hell itself. A believer's tongue is never to speak forth the fiery flames of hell's destructive words—words that are ugly, cursing, unclean, angry, divisive, unkind, suggestive, or talebearing.

You see the need for control? You see the need of mastering the tongue? You see the need of putting a bridle over your mouth? The tongue has the power of life and death. It is like a fire, to ignite those works of the flesh in our own sinful nature. It is better to bridle the tongue than to go around setting fires with your temper, which is of the flesh.

3:7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:— It is certainly a mystery and astounding that man can tame the beasts, birds, serpents, and mammals or creatures in the sea. James reminds us that animals can be tamed, therefore, the fire of the tongue can be tamed only by God. At Pentecost, that was the first part of our bodies that God took control of—the tongue. They were all on one accord in their speech.

3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. James says that no man can tame the tongue for it is *"unruly"* (*akatastaton*)—[*that is restless, uneasy, unstable, always roaming about*], evil, and full of deadly poison. Some animals are poisonous, but some of our tongues spread poison. Getting the poison out is God's job. Therefore, if God does not take control of your heart, it will be that way—full of evil and poison, but when God does fill our hearts with His love, then out of our hearts will flow the abundance of life filling the tongue with good and wholesome things. An evil tongue is the tool for the devil, but a wholesome tamed tongue is a tool for God! Praise God! If He can save a soul, He can tame a tongue, if we let Him.

James 3:9-12 A Forked Tongue

3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. James includes himself again as he refers to believers. The tongue can bless God in one breath and curse men in the next. The tongue gives us a picture of the basic human nature. We are good—made in God's image; but we are also bad—fallen and sinful. Are we a Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde? Heaven forbid! We must stay in fellowship with God. He works to change us from the inside out. While He is doing that, we must not attack man but speak against sin!

3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. As I said earlier, we only have one mouth and two eyes and out of that one mouth comes blessings and cursing. This is not supposed to come out of the believer's mouth. God wants consistent behavior; consistent speech that edifies. James calls them brethren, meaning we are of the family of God!

3:11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?— The question is asked in an illustration that they might understand about a double-tongue; a forked tongue, but one mouth. Even in the nature of a spring, it does not give forth sweet water first, and then bitter water? It would be contradicting itself; it would be inconsistent. God created it to be consistent.

3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Even in the nature of a fig tree, does it bear olive berries, and can a vine bear figs? We know the tree by the type of fruit that it bears. No tree can bear two kinds of fruit, so also a true believer would not produce both blessings of God and curses toward others.

SUMMARY:

²James begins this chapter with a caution against many becoming teachers. In view of the stricter judgment that awaits teachers, one should be sure they possess the maturity and self-control necessary to control the tongue (**vv1-2**).

James gives an illustration of a bit and rudder emphasizing its size and importance that controls a powerful horse and a huge ship. But the tongue also being a small member, can start a fire and can defile the whole body has not been tamed by mankind. Mankind can tame the animals but not his tongue (**vv.3-8**).

³James issued a warning: a fountain cannot give forth two kinds of water, and a tree cannot bear two kinds of fruit (**vv.9-12**).

APPLICATION:

If you look at a fork, it has splits. We are not to split our speech. It's damaging to us and to others.

² http://executableoutlines.com/ja2/ja2_03.htm

³ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/the-lips-need-to-bear-spiritual-fruit/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>