

The Troublesome Tongue

30 October 2016 AM – James 3:1-12 – Jas16 – Scott Childs

Introduction: The old saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me” is not true. Words can hurt badly. Have you ever been hurt by the words of someone? Yes, we all have. Read James 3:1-12

James begins this chapter and section with a stern warning to those who desire to be masters [Lit. teachers]. Those who teach others will be held accountable to a greater degree. Since we all teach someone, we all must heed the warnings of this chapter.

Transition: I find here **four facts** about the tongue that we must know before we will seriously work to control our tongues.

1. The Tongue is a Universal Offender, v.2

a. Everyone struggles with the tongue.

- 1) Some people talk more than others, but all who talk will occasionally offend with their tongue. (Proverbs 10:19) *“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”*
- 2) James reminds us that in many ways we offend all. In other words, we all stumble. We do not always keep our tongue under control. Sometimes we say unkind things that hurt others. (Proverbs 18:8) *“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”* Sometimes we use our tongue like a sword. (Proverbs 12:18) *“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.”*
- 3) A person who never offends or stumbles with his or her words is perfect or has finished maturing. That will not happen in this life.

b. Controlling the tongues is very difficult.

- 1) Solomon wrote, (Proverbs 21:23) *“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”*
- 2) Not only will controlling the tongue keep us out of a lot of trouble, but God is telling us that the tongue is **so difficult** to control that if we succeed, we will also be able to bridle or control all the other passions of the body.

b. The tongue defies nature and is a disgrace

- 1) One moment we bless God with our tongues, the next we curse men with our tongues. This is not right. The tongue of a Christian ought to say only things that are good works. **Remember the heartbeats of faith!** (Jas 2:14-26)
- 2) Two boys on the school playground were discussing a classmate. One of them remarked, “He’s no good at sports.” The other quickly responded, “Yes, but he always plays fair.” The critical one added, “He isn’t very smart in school either.” His friend answered, “That may be true, but he studies hard.” The boy with the mean tongue was becoming exasperated with the attitude of the other. “Well,” he sneered, “did you ever notice how ragged his clothes are?” The other boy kindly replied, “Yes, but did you ever notice, they’re always clean!” Every negative observation was countered by a positive one. (Biblical Illustrator)
- 3) What has come from your lips this week? Has it been praise to God, a witness for Christ, godly songs, encouraging words, or comfort for a hurting soul? Or has it been foul talk, swearing, angry words, dirty stories, lies, cutting remarks, name-calling, slander or gossip?

Conclusion: Our tongues may be small, but they are universal offenders, underrated destroyers, untameable dangers, and unnatural disgraces.

What should you do if your tongue is out of control? Confess it as sin to God. **Every time you fail**, seek the forgiveness of those whom you have offended. Ask the Lord for help in controlling your tongue. Daily pray as the Psalmist, (Psalms 19:14) *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”* Then walk in the Holy Spirit’s guiding control.

My friend, if you do not know for positive that Jesus Christ has cleansed your sin and given you eternal life, you must trust him for cleansing and forgiveness before you can ask him for help to control your tongue. A personal relationship with Christ is essential.

Song: Cleanse Me - 166

- 3) William Norris wrote: "If your lips would keep from slips, Five things observe with care: To whom you speak; of whom you speak; And how, and when, and where."

#1 The tongue is a universal offender and difficult to control.

2. The Tongue is an Underrated Destroyer, v.3-6

a. We often underrate the tongue's influence.

- 1) This is a huge mistake. James illustrates the influence of the tongue with **three small but powerful things**.
 - a) We put a **bit** in a horse's mouth, v.3. The bit is small compared to the size of the horse. Yet the tiny bit enables the rider to control the large horse.
 - b) Huge ships have a tiny **rudder** that the steersman can turn to steer the entire ship in the water, v.4.
 - c) A **spark** is all it takes to begin a huge forest fire, v.5. The word "*matter*" refers to a forest or a huge pile of wood.
- 2) Each of these small things has great influence. The same is true of our small tongue. Note that James reminds us that the tongue *boasts great things*, v.5. We must not underrate its destructive ability. (Proverbs 18:21) "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue:*"

b. Though small, the tongue is a mighty destroyer

- 1) James builds on the fire illustration (v.6).
 - a) The *tongue is a fire*. It burns. It destroys. It consumes. Its work cannot be undone. A **parent's cutting words** can destroy a child's self worth. A **slandering comment** can destroy a person's reputation. **Angry outburst** can destroy a marriage.
 - b) The tongue is a *world of iniquity* or a world of unrighteousness. It is able to say all sorts of things that are not right in God's eyes.
 - c) The tongue *defiles the whole body*. It can stain your whole reputation. It can destroy another's feelings, emotions, esteem, reputation, and even health.
 - d) The tongue *sets on fire the course of nature*. The word "*course*" refers to a wheel or a cycle. Have you ever heard the saying, "**What goes around comes**

around?" The words of the tongue can have a domino effect, spreading like a plague. They can come back to haunt you.

- e) The tongue *is set on fire of hell*. The uncontrolled tongue is fuelled by the hell-bound devil and demons. The tongue can be **very** destructive!

- 2) Washington Irving said, "**A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use.**"

3. The Tongue is an Untameable Danger, v.7-8

a. Wild beasts can be tamed, but not the tongue.

- 1) All sorts of creatures have been tamed. To *tame* a beast means to make it safe to be around and to perform according to your wishes. A circus is a good example of this where bears, lions, elephants and other dangerous animals are tamed and trained.
- 2) Nobody can tame the tongue. We can guard it. With God's help we can control it. **But the tongue remains a danger that we can never fully trust**. We cannot trust it because it speaks the thoughts of our heart. Our hearts are constantly being tempted with evil. That is why Solomon warns, (Proverbs 4:23) "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*"

b. The tongue is an unruly evil full of deadly poison

- 1) Our tongues are *unruly* or unrestrainable when it comes to evil. We need God's help to control what we say. (Galatians 5:16) "*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*"
- 2) Our tongues are full of *deadly poison*. Words can kill in many ways. They are a GREAT danger. You have been hurt by a tongue and no doubt you have hurt others with your tongue. **Beware! Your tongue is an untameable danger.**

4. The Tongue is an Unnatural Disgrace, v.9-12

a. Products in nature are consistent

- 1) If a *fountain* has sweet water one day, it will not be salty the next day. That is part of God's design in nature.
- 2) A *fig tree* will produce figs never olives
- 3) A *grape vine* will always produce grapes, never figs.