



James Chapter 3 – The Tongue – Who can tame it? Only God.

Words are powerful. Proverbs 18:21 tells us LIFE and DEATH are in the power of the tongue. It is a small part of the body, yet it can bring about tremendous impact - either for good or for bad.

Fire brings life. The sun burns and its rays bring life to the earth.

Without the light from the fire of the sun, the earth will die. Fire brings warmth. Fire brings light. Fire is powerful and it can be used for tremendous good, but it can also be incredibly destructive. People out west have lost property. The air quality has been so bad from the fires that people couldn't even breathe. So, on one hand fire can bring death, and on another hand, it brings life. What is the big difference? Fire can do great things when it is under control! It brings death and destruction when it is out of control. This is an exact parallel of what goes on with the taming of the tongue.

James 3 is talking about “taming the tongue.” James will talk about taming something wild to be used for good. The tongue is analogous to the bit in the mouth of a horse, the rudder of a ship, or a small fire. From our tongues can come great good or great destruction. Remember what we learned before: Be QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, AND SLOW TO ANGER.

My father used to say that every human contact is an opportunity for courtesy or conflict. Choose courtesy. Those human contacts involve the tongue and how we choose to use it; to build up or to tear down. When our words are quick and hasty, they can spread trouble and destruction like wildfire.

The Book of James hits us hard. It may not be filled with a lot of doctrine as are some of the Pauline letters, but it is filled with how you and I are to live out the reality of the Lord in our lives.

Chapter 1 opened telling us to consider all joy when we encounter hardship in our lives. It calls us to listening to and doing the will of God. It calls us to humility. It calls us to be single minded, getting off the fence where we have one foot in the world and one foot in the Kingdom. A person that follows the flesh one minute and follows the Holy Spirit another will be unstable in all of their ways (James 1:8). Chapter 2 calls us to examine the fruit of our faith

in our lives. And now, chapter 3 goes from preaching to meddling. We have all said things we shouldn't have said. We have all been cruel and reckless with our tongue.

When I began walking with the Lord and when I first gave my heart to Him, it seemed that the last thing to follow was my tongue. I would say obscene and vulgar things. They would come out of nowhere. I remember I used to make a New Year's Resolution each year that no filthiness or cursing would come out of my mouth in the new year. It took many years for God to do a work in my life that reflected the change that had taken place in my heart. The tongue is a really tiny part of our bodies, but it is an amazingly powerful tool.

James 3:1 - Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we who are teachers will incur a stricter judgment. (NASB).

James starts with a discussion about teachers. We are told that there will be a stricter judgment on us as teachers are held to a higher standard. One reason I write out my sermons is to be careful and to be certain in what I say. The Word tells us to be very careful about who we allow to teach in this assembly. I guard this pulpit carefully as I am responsible for how I allow the Word of truth to be divided before this congregation. When we teach, we are telling people about the heart of God and essence of God. We are to be very careful to say what God says, while ensuring that we do not add to what He says. Moses got into trouble for that. He ended up being barred from the promised land because of his missteps with God's truth.

When Jesus was in His ministry, He was particularly fed up with the teachers, the Pharisees. He loved them but He called them to task for adding layer upon layer to scripture and for misinterpreting what God had said in His word. The more you learn of God's Word, the more responsible you too will be before God for your actions, thoughts, ideas, etc. Next James talks about the "biggest troublemaker in the church." Who is this troublemaker?

James 2:2-4 - For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to rein in the whole body as well. ³ Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well. ⁴ Look at the ships too: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are nevertheless directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines. (NASB).

James starts off telling us that we've all sinned and come short of God's glory. He says that we all stumble in many ways. Scripture tells us, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10b, NKJV). I think James is telling us that the tongue is just like that bit in the mouth of a horse or that rudder on the back end of a ship. The tongue is tiny but it brings about huge

effects. It's important to identify where this weird stuff comes from that comes out of our mouth. You see, the tongue just reveals what is going on in our hearts.



“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”(Luke 6:45, NASB).

There is no denying that what comes out of our mouth comes straight up from our hearts. James is telling us that small things can have big impacts. For example, the bit that goes into a horse's mouth controls a whole lot. I have a Percheron mare in my barn that is gigantic, yet she is controlled by a tiny little bit. In the same way, huge ships are directed by a tiny rudder.

James 3:5 - So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (NASB). Many of you all may remember the Dyer Mill Road fire that started on Father's Day in 2011. It started with a guy lighting a bbq pit with a tiny lighter and it ended up burning for weeks and did over 100 million dollars of damage right here behind our church. A tiny fire can do devastating things when it gets out of control. The tiny tongue is just like that!



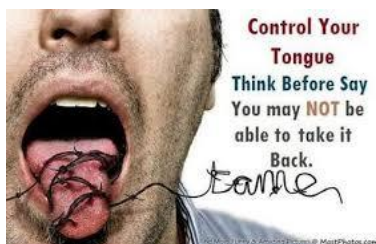
James 3:6-8a - And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸ But no one among mankind can tame the tongue. (NASB).

The tongue is a “world of evil among the parts.” It defiles our whole body. It is that tiny little part of us that can bring hell into our lives and hell into the lives of others. All sorts of creatures are tamed, but no man can tame his tongue. Why? Because it's connected to our hearts and our hearts can ONLY be changed by God. When we are double-minded we do not have control of our tongues. Nor does God have control of our tongues.

Our problem is that God is still changing our hearts. He's not done yet and we keep spouting out stuff from the recesses of our hearts that have not been completely changed. It takes time. Junk may keep coming up out our hearts for years and years. Keep allowing the Word of God to wash your heart and mind, and your tongue will follow.

James 3:8b-12 - it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way. ¹¹ Does a spring send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, bear olives, or a vine bear figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh. (NASB).

When I contemplate my need to shut up, I like to remember a wonderful verse. “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.” (Proverbs 10:19, NASB). But let’s look at the Living Bible. It says, “Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut.” (Proverbs 10:19, NLT). OUCH! That’s talking to YOU and ME.



Hold your tongue. If you talk a lot, you’re going to have issues with other people. You will be absolutely toxic in the presence of others. You are going to say something stupid that will require years to reestablish trust with others. Your tongue will not help you keep your job. It will get you fired. A few words can kill a

marriage relationship. Couples need to agree that when the emotions are running high to just wait a while to talk things out. You’re not going to get it worked out with emotional words shooting out of your mouth.

It has been said, “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” That is a lie. Words do hurt. They cause damage. By saying the wrong thing, you can kill another person’s sense of worth. The words you say to others can live inside of them for a long time. It can be wonderful if they are words of blessing. If they are words of cursing, they remain in the person’s heart and they are like embers that never go out. When you get burned, it doesn’t hurt much at first, but it keeps on burning. A few years ago, I was burned in a farm accident. It didn’t hurt for the first 15 minutes but it was excruciating for the next 15 weeks. It seemed to keep on burning and burning in my flesh. Words work the same way.

James says we come to church praising the Lord and then we turn around and berate each other. Out of our same mouths comes blessing and cursings. He calls us “brothers” and says, “this should not be.” If our souls have been redeemed, then our tongues should also be redeemed. Can fresh water and salt water come out of the same well? NO. God intends for our mouths to be used for Him and His glory.

God gave us this powerful tongue to affirm, build up, and love others, but we still have that old sin nature living within us. We have been redeemed and our tongue is redeemed. It was

bought back and belongs to the Lord. It no longer belongs to us. Your mouth now belongs to God. It is bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. What an amazing thing our mouth can be when it is used for His purposes.

I think God wants us to speak truth into others. Speak positive things into the world around you. Don't speak slanderously behind other's backs. Some of you will praise the Lord when you're talking to me and then tell me how someone is a jerk and you don't like them. James is saying to STOP DOING THAT. The Bible tells us to do everything without grumbling and complaining (Philippians 2:14). We have a redeemed tongue, so let's act like it.

Gossip is that thing that we all think is bad, but we all do it. James is telling us to stop talking about things that are none of your concern. I remember my mother telling me, "If you can't say something good about someone then don't say anything." Be kind. Be courteous. Criticism is damaging and it is so harmful. This is how the tongue becomes the biggest trouble maker in the church. Stop assessing each other. Stop sizing each other up. God did not make you the police to point out other people's problems. Jesus tells us to deal with the log in your own eye before you work on the piece of sawdust in someone else's eye (Matthew 7:5). Why do we feel so compelled to talk about others? Maybe we do so to take the attention off of our own shortcomings.



Maybe we all need a little conviction of our wrongdoing this morning, but more than that, I want to encourage you to realize this magnificently powerful tool that God has entrusted you with. Start using it for good. Start using it to share the love of Jesus. Let's take a minute and let the Holy Spirit convict us, and then let's thank the Lord for His forgiveness. Let's ask Him to give us the power to have victory over this area of our life. You

might be the next Esther who was created "for such a time as this." On Wednesday night, Cowboy Bill shared a wonderful little poem with me. I'd like to share it with you. "A wise old owl sat in an oak, the more he saw the less he spoke, the less he spoke the more he heard. Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?"

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by

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