

“The Tongue” **James 3:1-12**

Introduction: What does the Bible have to say about the tongue?

1. Speech is one of the greatest powers that the Lord has given us. We can, with speech, pray, preach, and praise the Lord.
Psalm 126:1-2- “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.”
2. Speech can also be one of the most destructive powers. Therefore, we must get control over the tongue!
 - a. *Colossians 4:6- “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”*
 - b. *James 1:19- “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”*
 - c. *James 1:26- “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”*
3. “For every word in Hitler’s book, *Mein Kampf*, 125 lives were lost in World War II. Our own words may not have caused wars or wrecked cities, but they can break hearts and ruin reputations.” (Wiersbe)
4. “The words we speak affect the lives of others. A judge says ‘Guilty!’ or ‘Not Guilty!’ and those words affect the destiny of the prisoner, his family, and his friends. The President of the United States speaks a few words and signs some papers and the nation is at war. Even a simple yes or no from the lips of a parent can greatly affect the direction of a child’s life.” (Wiersbe)
 - a. *Proverbs 15:1- “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”*
 - b. *Proverbs 12:22- “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.”*
 - c. *Proverbs 10:19- “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”*
 - d. *Proverbs 17:27- “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.”*
5. We speak what is in our heart. **James 3:14**
Matthew 15:18- “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.”
6. A slip of the foot you may soon recover,
But a slip of the tongue you may never get over. (Benjamin Franklin)
7. James gives us six pictures and brings out three points about the tongue in chapter three.
 - a. The Direction of the Tongue **vs. 1-4**
 - (1) bit **v. 3**
 - (2) helm **v. 4**

- b. The Destruction of the Tongue vs. 5-8
 - (1) fire vs. 5-6
 - (2) poison vs. 7-8
- c. The Delight of the Tongue vs. 9-12
 - (1) fountain vs. 9-11
 - (2) fig tree v. 12

Body: One of the greatest chapters on the tongue is James 3. Notice:

- I. The Direction of the Tongue vs. 1-4
 - In verse one, we see how bad teachers does much harm. Apparently, many wanted to teach that James had to rebuke.
 - In verse two, we see how words will lead to deeds. “Loose Lips Sink Ships!”
- A. It Must Be Conquered—Nature v. 3- *“Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.”*
 - 1. One has to overcome the wild nature of the horse. As goes the mouth, so goes the body.
 - 2. Psalm 34:13- *“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.”*
 - 3. Ecclesiastes 5:6- *“Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin...”*
 - 4. “Both the bit and the rudder must overcome contrary forces. The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse, and the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin. There are circumstances around us that would make us say things we ought not to say. Sin on the inside and pressures on the outside are seeking to get control of the tongue.” (Wiersbe)
- B. It Must Be Controlled—Navigation v. 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.”*
 - 1. Think about the affects that a runaway horse or ship could do.
 - 2. “Every action of the horse is controlled when the mouth of the horse is controlled.” (Shepherd)
 - 3. Proverbs 18:21- *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”*
 - 4. Psalm 141:3- *“Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”*
 - 5. Psalm 39:1- *“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.”*
 - a. Do you speak a cross word or tell a lie?
 - b. Do you answer back in a wrong way?
 - c. Do you say anything suggestive or vulgar?
 - d. Do you say anything of which, afterward, you feel ashamed?

- e. Do you speak angrily in a fit of temper or say anything that called for an apology?
- f. What about: gossip, criticizing or running someone down, complain, murmur, grumble, slander, exaggerate, cuss, say hurtful things, boast, brag, argue, speak rebelliously, or flirt?
- 6. Gossip? Titus 3:2- *“To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.”*
- 7. Job 2:10- *“...In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”*
- 8. Matthew 12:36- *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”*
- 9. Luke 12:2-3- *“For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”*
- 10. In Proverbs 6:16-19, three of the seven things that God hates deals with sins of the tongue.
 - a. v. 17- *“...a lying tongue...”*
 - b. v. 19- *“A false witness that speaketh lies...”*
 - c. v. 19- *“...he that soweth discord among brethren.”*
- 11. The steering wheel has got to be in the hands of a strong man! (Jesus)
- 12. When Jesus has control of our heart, He has control over our mouth.
- 13. Matthew 12:34- *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*

II. The Destruction of the Tongue vs. 5-8

- A. Its Sparking v. 5- *“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”*
 - 1. What size fire kindles a forest fire?
 - 2. “A fire reportedly started in the O’Leary barn in Chicago at 8:30 P.M., October 8, 1871; and because that fire spread, over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, and 300 people died. It cost the city over 400 million.” (Wiersbe)
 - 3. The tongue is an arsonist!
- B. Its Spreading v. 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.”*
 - 1. The tongue is a world of iniquity. It can speak falsehood and filth. It can criticize and complain. It can contaminate and corrupt. (Phillips)
 - 2. Equation: Hot Head + Hot Heart = Burning Words
 - a. Psalm 39:3- *“My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue”*
 - b. Proverbs 16:27- *“An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.”*

- c. Proverbs 26:20-23- *“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.”*
- 3. Fire damages as it spreads: smoke, damage, hurt.
- 4. The tongue is set on fire of hell. Luke 16:24- *“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”*
- C. Its Secret vs. 7-8- *“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: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”*
 - 1. Poison works in the secret.
 - 2. Romans 3:13- *“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips”*

III. The Delight of the Tongue vs. 9-12

- A. It Preserves v. 11- *“Doth a fountain...water...”*
 - 1. Water is life giving and refreshing.
 - 2. Proverbs 10:11- *“The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.”*
 - 3. Water keeps you healthy.
 - 4. Proverbs 12:18- *“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.”*
 - 5. Proverbs 31:26- *“She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.”*
- B. It Purifies v. 11- *“Doth a fountain...water...”*
 - 1. John 15:3- *“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”*
 - 2. Ephesians 5:26- *“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”*
- C. It Produces v. 12- *“Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”*
 - 1. The most important thing about the tree is its root system. Application: Communion v. 14 (This is the problem!)
 - 2. Nature reproduces after its kind.
 - 3. Matthew 7:17- *“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”*
 - 4. Matthew 7:18- *“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”*
 - 5. Proverbs 10:21- *“The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.”*

6. John 6:63- *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”*

Conclusion: In verse 13 we see how actions speak louder than words.

1. Our tongue does not have to be a troublemaker.
2. Give God your tongue and your heart.
3. There are some words that we need to learn:
 - a. Please and Thank You—It shows appreciation; “When you use these three words, you are treating others like people and not things.” (Wiersbe)
 - b. I’m Sorry—It breaks down walls and builds bridges
 - c. I Love You—It reveals a unity between God and others
 - d. I Am Praying For You—It reveals concern and offers encouragement
4. Colossians 4:6- *“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”*
5. Titus 2:8- *“Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”*
6. Isaiah 50:4- *“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”*