

## Bible Lesson – James 3:5-8

### The Tongue of Cursing

<sup>5</sup> 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! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup> But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

1. James is warning about the grim wreckage that the tongue inflicts.
  - a. **James 1:26;** <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.
    - i. One Commentator: "An out-of-control tongue suggests bogus religion, no matter how well one's devotion is carried out. The true test of a man's spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue."
  - b. The grim wreckage, an illustration: William Wilberforce (2006 movie, Amazing Grace)
    - i. (1759 – 1833) Was an English politician, philanthropist, and a leader of the movement to eradicate the slave trade. At 26 years old, he became a Christian, which resulted in major changes to his lifestyle and a lifelong concern for reform. He headed the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty years until the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.
    - ii. He took high society elites that were opposed to abolishing slavery on a purported "pleasure boat" cruise. He pulled up next to a slave ship. The stench was overwhelming – sweat, blood, urine, feces, death. Wilberforce forced them to confront the atrocity of slavery in order to bring about the end of it.
  - c. In the same way, our tongues are terribly destructive, and can be an atrocity to how we treat others.
2. So small yet so powerful
  - a. A Horse is controlled by small bits. One tiny piece of wood or metal in a horse's mouth gives you the power to direct their entire bodies.
  - b. A ship is steered by a small rudder.
    - i. Noah's ark had no rudder or sail - God controlled it.
      1. One Commentator: "Oh to have a spiritual rudder to control our words!"
        - a. We do have a spiritual rudder in the Holy Spirit, but our sin nature sometimes keeps us from bridling our tongue.
  - c. Likewise, although the tongue is a small part of the human body, it influences the whole body and wields incredible power.
3. Your words spring forth in many forms.
  - a. Not just your audible speech, but also...letters, emails, voicemails, texts, phone calls, social media posts, online debate/arguments, videos, thoughts unspoken.
  - b. **Proverbs 4:24;** <sup>24</sup> Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you.
  - c. **Matt. 12:36-37;** <sup>36</sup> But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.
4. The Tongue – An all-consuming fire. 5 ways.
  - a. [1] Thoroughly destructive
    - i. 4x compares the tongue to fire. Fire doesn't just damage; it destroys everything.
    - ii. The tongue destroys others; verbal abuse
    - iii. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.

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1. This saying has good intentions – to help you resist the temptation to respond in kind. But it's not really true...words do hurt, and sometimes they destroy.
  - a. The body can heal much better from physical hurt than the soul can heal from hurtful words.
- iv. **Proverbs 16:27**; <sup>27</sup> A worthless man digs up evil, while his words are like scorching fire.
- b. [2] Exponentially destructive
  - i. Like an out of control wild fire. Starts small but:
    1. Can cause massive damage
    2. Spreads quickly and broadly
      - a. social media
  - ii. Two ways it destroys
    1. Face to face
    2. Said in absence
      - a. Gossip – true statements
      - b. Slander – false statements made without knowing the facts, or deliberate lies
        - i. **Proverbs 20:19**; <sup>19</sup> He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip.
- c. [3] Self destructive
  - i. Destroy yourself
    1. Reap what you sow.
      - a. If you gossip about or slander others, others may do the same to you.
      - b. **Galatians 6:8**; <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
    2. You become untrustworthy to others.
      - a. **Jeremiah 15:18**; <sup>18</sup>...like a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable
      - b. **Proverbs 6:16-19**; <sup>16</sup> There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, <sup>19</sup> A false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.
- d. [4] Demonically destructive
  - i. V.6 Hell
    1. "The imagery used by James is that of "fire" and "hell" itself. He uses the term "Gehenna" for hell referring to a burning garbage dump in the Valley of Hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Burning "garbage speech" such as gossip, lying, empty chatter, and slander can cause incredible harm. Even one word out of place can consume and destroy a life."
  - ii. Satan loves and uses the tongue to destroy men.
  - iii. So simple to deploy. Pits man vs man.
    1. Destroys peace & unity of the Church.
- e. [5] Incurably destructive – v.8; untamable, restless (unstable)
  - i. Untamable: Man has tamed beasts (lions, elephants, killer whales), but no human can tame the tongue.
  - ii. Unstable: like a gun in a nervous hand threatening anyone near it with venomous bullets.

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1. **Psalm 140:3**; They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; poison of a viper is under their lips.
  2. **Romans 3:13**; “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The poison of asps is under their lips”
5. The Cure – Taming the tongue
- a. Bridle your tongue (**James 1:26**)
    - i. You cannot do it by yourself with your own will, but only by God’s grace.
    - ii. Depend on the only one who can tame the tongue – Christ.
    - iii. **Proverbs 17:27-28**; <sup>27</sup>The man of few words and settled mind is wise; <sup>28</sup> therefore, even a fool is thought to be wise when he is silent. It pays him to keep his mouth shut. (The Living Bible)
  - b. Correct hurtful behavior:
    - i. Avoid being a party to or a conduit for gossip.
      1. **Proverbs 16:28**; A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.
    - ii. Don’t use insincere flattery.
      1. **Proverbs 26:28**; A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.
    - iii. Don’t speak badly about another.
      1. **James 4:11**; <sup>11</sup> Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.
      2. Judge not lest ye be judged.
    - iv. Refrain from degrading humor.
      1. **Ephesians 5:4**; <sup>4</sup> and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.
    - v. Refrain from sarcasm.
      1. **Psalm 31:18**; Let the lying lips be mute, which speak arrogantly against the righteous with pride and contempt.
  - c. Let your speech be wise and used for building others up:
    - i. Speak the truth in love
      1. **Ephesians 4:15-16**; <sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.
    - ii. Refuse to speak evil of others
      1. **Psalm 34:13**; <sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.
    - iii. Use your tongue to bless others
      1. **Proverbs 15:4**; <sup>4</sup> A soothing tongue is a tree of life...
      2. **Proverbs 12:18**; <sup>18</sup> ...the tongue of the wise brings healing.
    - iv. Use your tongue to praise the God who made you, saved you, and constantly cares for you.
      1. Hymn: “O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing”
  - d. Self-discipline in one’s speech usually indicates discipline in other areas of life.
  - e. Prayers:
    - i. Lord keep your arm around my shoulder and your hand over my mouth.
    - ii. Lord, please keep a watch over the door of my lips.