

Sermon Outline

THE TONGUE (2): A WILD FIRE THAT MUST BE CONTROLLED

James 3:5b-12

Introduction

Is the battle with our tongues winnable sometime before death?

The negative aspect of the tongue

- I. It has the potential to be very destructive (verses 5b-6).
 - a. It is like fire (Ja 3:5b and Prov 16:27) because:
 - It is wide-ranging: it is called an arrow (Ps 64:3); it ranges over the whole earth and reaches to heaven (Ps 73:9).
 - Like a forest fire, the damage is uncontrollable (Ja 3:8).
 - b. Its character – the world or “kosmos” of unrighteousness (verse 6).
 - “Kosmos” means the world without God (John 14:17,22; 15:18,19; 18:36; 1 Cor 1:20; and Rom 12:2).
 - Not everything about the tongue is evil. The tongue is a double edged sword (see previous sermon).
 - It can be a great blessing, but also a great curse. It depends on who is in control of our tongues. (There will be no salvation without the preaching of the Gospel and witnessing.)
 - James’s concern here is the important of controlling our tongue, so he stresses the destructiveness of the evil use of the tongue.
 - c. Its influence – staining the whole body (verse 6).
 - Since the tongue is involved in all the thoughts, imaginings, longings and plans which lie behind the whole of our earthly life, it leaves the mark of its own defilement everywhere.
 - Mark 7:20 says, “*What comes out of a person is what defiles him.*”
 - d. Its continuance throughout the whole of life (*the entire course of life*), even after we die (verse 6).
 - e. Its affiliation with the very fire of hell (verse 6).
 - The tongue becomes the instrument of Satan himself.
 - Psalm 55:21, says, “*His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.*”
 - Sometimes the tongue is so subtle, we think that it intends well when it intends evil. It is a tool of Satan to pollute our whole person.

- II. It is humanly uncontrollable (verses 7,8).
- The comparison is not between man and beast, but between human nature and animal nature (*phusis* = kind or nature).
 - Man can tame the beasts (to have its nature conformed to man's wishes), but he cannot tame himself (control or change his nature), even by any force.
 - Why man in his sinful nature cannot control his tongue? Because it "*is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*"
 - What does that mean?
 - J. B. Phillips: "restless" = "always liable to break out."
 - Man can train the external manifestations of his nature, but he cannot change the nature itself from which these manifestations spring. The evil in man is always liable to break out and suddenly turning savage.
 - 'Poison' can also mean 'arrow' (Psalm 64:3,4)
 - James does not simply say that the tongue is untameable, but that it cannot be subdued by any power resident in mere human nature.
 - Man needs a completely new nature, a new birth, a regeneration, to control his tongue.
 - God must first give this perfect gift of a new nature to us through his Word (James 1:18).
- III. It involves us in the sin of inconsistency and hypocrisy (verses 9-12).
- James writes to Christian Jews (James 1:1).
 - James includes himself here and no non-Christian will bless the Lord and Father.
 - Do those whom the grace of God has touched are able to control their tongues? James answers "no".
 - Moses failed in controlling his tongue (Psalm 106:33)
 - Paul curses God's high priest (Acts 23:3), breaking God's commandment (Exodus 22:28).
 - Peter denied Jesus with oaths and curses (compare Mat 26:35 and Mat 26:69-75).
 - John wishes to call down fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village out of existence (compare 1 John 3:18 and Lk 9:51-56).
 - The tongue makes Christians, even those spiritual giants, to involve in the deadly sin of hypocrisy: we bless and curse the same thing, the image of God.
 - Jesus' explicit command, "[B]less those who curse you" (Luke 6:28).
 - Three illustrations to press further his point:
 - Two separate sources of water are assumed to flow together into the same outlet, one sweet or fresh water, the other brackish and unpalatable, but we would never know of the double source because the salty flavour would prevail.
 - The fruit of a tree must agree with the nature of the tree.
 - The final illustration is different from the first one in verse 11. In verse 11, so to speak, we stood beside the tap or the outlet and there are two sources flow to the tap, one fresh and another brackish, and we would never know there are two

sources because the salty flavour prevails. But in verse 12, we are invited to go back beyond the outlet to the source or spring itself. A salt spring cannot yield fresh water.

- All three illustrations stress the consistency of nature.
- So is the battle with our tongues winnable sometime before death?
- Borrowing James' illustration, there are two streams within us (the old and new man), but only one outlet, and out of that outlet there is only one kind of water that must come out, either sweet or brackish.
- James final conclusion: the tongue is humanly uncontrollable, a restless evil, full of deadly poison and involves Christians in the sin of hypocrisy.
- Apostle John says, *"If we say we have not sinned, we make [Christ] a liar, and his word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10).
- But there is a time, according to John, that we will hold our tongue completely forever when Christ *"appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure"* (1 John 3:2,3).
- By God's grace we can overcome our human weaknesses now as we hope in Christ's appearing.
- Apostle Paul speaking to those who have new lives in Christ, says, *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"* (Eph 4:29,30).