



## “Taming the Terrible Tongue” (James 1:26; 3:1-12)

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1:26 What a statement/truth! My tongue will reveal the genuineness of my “religion” (fearing or worshipping God). The second time it appears in this verse it is a slightly different word, and it refers to religious discipline/practice. So what God is saying to us is very clear: No amount of religious practice means anything if it does not affect my tongue.

- Isaiah 58:4 (context)
- Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

3:1 Some people desire the office of teacher (See I Timothy 1:7). I never did, but here I am nevertheless. And this verse is very sobering (and sometimes frightening) for me. If I take what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37 in the context of me as a teacher of the Word of God, it should cause me to work hard at making certain I am teaching the truth. Jesus said that we will give account for every “careless” word we have spoken.

- “Careless” (1) free from labor, at leisure; (2) lazy, shunning the labor which one ought to perform
- See II Timothy 2:15, 16-18; I Tim.4:1-4

As a pastoral staff we are reading the book I recently mentioned titled *The Circle Maker*, and this past Thursday we had some doctrinal discussion about the book. While at first I was discouraged by the discussion, I have since been encouraged that we have a pastoral staff that seeks to rightly divide the Word of God. Pray for us, that God would grant us wisdom, and unity.

We could talk more about the great responsibility of teaching the Word of God, but verse two moves us on to include everyone and anyone who has a working tongue.

3:2 This is fascinating! If I can get a handle on my tongue I can keep my whole body in check. When someone is able to control their tongue, they can also control the rest of their body. The tongue is in a way the last frontier for the person of faith.

3:3-7 The horse is a powerful animal. Put 550 pounds on a horse's back (as much as an Olympic heavyweight can hoist overhead), and it will barely snort as it breathes easily under such a heavy burden. Without the weight, that same horse can sprint a quarter of a mile in about 25 seconds! But, you place a bridle and a bit in the horse's mouth, put a 100 pound woman who knows what she is doing on it's back, and that animal can literally be made to dance. Man can control a powerful animal like a horse by placing a bit in the horse's mouth that presses against the horse's tongue.

Man can steer a huge ship with a very small rudder. On the few cruises I have been on, I am always fascinated when the captain maneuvers that ship into port.

But more powerful than a horse or a ship is this little instrument in my mouth. Incredible! The tongue is a fire that corrupts my whole body; One small spark can do great damage; In Chicago October 8, 1871 at 8:30 P.M., a spark started in Mrs. O'Leary's barn. And before it was over, that one spark from supposedly one cow in Mrs. O'Leary's barn burnt 17,500 buildings, 300 people were burned to death, 125,000 people were homeless. They estimated the damage at 400 million dollars, and in 1871 that was like billions today.

- A saying I heard often as a young boy was "Stick and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me." It's not true at all!
- Prov.18: 21 The tongue has the power of life and death...
- The tongue can tear down people. It can destroy churches, relationships, marriages, families, communities, even nations. It can cause knock down drag out fights. It can cause murder.
- Numbers 14:1-4; Acts 19:23-32; John 21:22-23; Prov.18:18; 26:22

3:7-8 Going to Barnum and Bailey last year, amazing! But when I think of what I witnessed at the circus in light of what these verses declare, how depressing! An elephant, a lion, a tiger can be tamed by man, yet no man can tame the tongue.

- The tongue is fueled by hell. Now that's a problem!
- No man can tame the tongue; Can't put a bit in my mouth or a rudder on my tongue and it do any good.

So is there any hope? Our next verses begin to give us a clue...

3:9-12 What a picture is painted for us here. Can you see it? Here's someone who in one minute is praising God, then the next minute is cursing at another human being. When I read it I had an image of someone in a church service praising the Lord, then upon leaving the service cursing at another driver they encounter on the highway. When they get home, they curse and/or yell at other family members, etc.

But there is a clue for hope in these verses. Read verses 11-12 again. The idea here is that the source will only produce the content already there. So change has to be made at the source.

- Matthew 12: 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For *out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.
- Jer.17:9-10

## MY HOPE IN TAMING THE TERRIBLE TONGUE

### 1. Divine Intervention

- Ezekiel 36:26
- When I received Jesus Christ as my lord and Savior, God changed my heart. As a result, my conversation immediately changed. I could cuss like a sailor, but right away that was cleaned up. My whole conversation changed...
- Rom.2:28-29; Deut.30:6

### 2. Personal Responsibility

- Deut.10:16; Jer.4:4

### 3. Humility

- II Chron.26 ----- Peter after cursing and denying Christ
- James 1:21
- Joshua 24:23

### 4. Daily Diet

- Prov.4:23
- Rom.12:2; Heb.4:12

### 5. Discipline

- Note: no man can tame the tongue, so this must be done in cooperation with and submission to the Spirit of God, and fed by the Word of God.
- James 1:19; Prov.29:11; II Peter 1:6; Psalm 39:1

## CONCLUSION

- On the one hand, this little instrument in our mouth is powerful to do great harm, and without God that is exactly what it will do. But if we allow God to change our heart, then our tongue can be used to build up rather than tear down, to encourage rather than discourage, to comfort rather than cause pain, to bring peace rather than strife and division...
- When you go to the doctor in the old days he would always say, “Stick out your tongue” in order to check your condition. Here in James 3, God says to us, stick out your tongue. How ya doin?