

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 10

March 31, 2002

3 *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* ² *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* ³ *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.* ⁴ *Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.* ⁵ *Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.* ⁶ *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* ⁷ *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,* ⁸ *but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.* ¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.* ¹¹ *Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?* ¹² *My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James starts by addressing the position of teacher. A teacher speaks the Word of God to others. He uses his tongue to communicate to others. The scriptures teach that those in that position will give an account to God for their words. If they teach false doctrine, or lead others astray with their words, they will be judged for that. If they refuse to warn others, or tickle ears, or try to please those who hear them by watering down the truth, they will answer to God. Teaching God's word is a very serious job. This principle does not only apply to those in the position of teacher, but also to any person who gives advice, counsel, opinion, or direction to another. We will all be held accountable for whatever counsel or advice that we give to others. We are all teachers. The point is this: We should take our words of counsel to others very seriously. Proverbs 18:21 says that the power of death and life is in the tongue. With our tongues, we have the potential to edify and encourage, or to tear down and destroy. And every time we instruct another person, we are doing one or the other, and God will hold us responsible for our words.

James 3:2-4 ² *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* ³ *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.* ⁴ *Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.*

Verse 2 states a fact. We are all sinners. We all fall short. And a place where our sinfulness readily manifests is in our words. What is speech? It is an expression of our thoughts, our feelings, our beliefs, and our heart.

This passage in James is not just about cleaning up what we say. Look closely at the passage. It says that our tongue is potential trouble, because we are all sinners. James is saying we need to take our speech and our words very seriously, because this small piece of flesh in our mouths has great power to direct our whole lives and severely affect others. If we don't control it, it can kill and destroy, and send lives into destruction.

James 3:5-8 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Verse 5 talks about boasting. What is boasting? It is the verbal expression of pride. It is words of self sufficiency and self confidence and self direction. It is what a person says who has a high view of himself, his abilities, and his own talents. The tongue can boast of self-sufficiency, greatness, and the ability to control and direct our own lives. The prophet Jeremiah had some stern words about boasting:

Jer 29: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD

If we have anything to be confident in, or to rejoice in, or to boast about, it is about the greatness of God, and the fact that by His mercy and grace He chose to reveal Himself to us, to forgive us, and to draw us unto Himself. It is His kindness in our lives that produces any goodness or blessing that we have.

James goes on to say that such boasting that results from pride can cause a spark that kindles a fire that ends in huge devastation and destruction. What does pride and boasting sound like? To exalt myself, what must I do? I must put down another. Criticism is a verbal manifestation of a proud heart. Criticism by its very nature carries a superior attitude. A self-righteous attitude will manifest in boasting about oneself and criticism of others. Jealousy, pride, and envy are poisons that reside in the heart, and the tongue is the instrument of destruction that spreads that infection to others. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:33-37 as He addressed the self righteous religious leaders of the day:

Mt 12: ³³ "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 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. 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."

The point is this. Because we are sinners, our tongues have the potential to spread the evil that is within us to other people, resulting in great destruction. We need to recognize our vulnerability and weakness and the need for control; the control of the Spirit, for no man can tame the tongue. If we for a moment believe that we have within ourselves the power to control our tongues, we are headed for trouble. We need the help and

power of the only One who can deal the source of the poison in our tongues, which is the sin in our heart. James says the cursing and bitter speech coming out of our mouth is indication of a contaminated source. You can't get fresh water from a saltwater source, and you can't get olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine. For our mouth to bring forth goodness and grace and mercy and love, our hearts must be filled with mercy, goodness, grace and love. These attributes do not naturally reside in our hearts. We need to receive mercy, grace, love, and goodness. And we also need to be cleansed from the evil within before we can express genuine goodness and life to others. We need Jesus! We need forgiveness! We need a Savior! We need something outside of ourselves! This should be our response when we hear unwholesome speech coming from our lips. Listen to James 4:8-10

8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

I John 1:8-9

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Titus 2:11 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

When we are humble, and admit our sins, and confess our weakness, and cry out to God for help in our time of need, then He is faithful not only to forgive us, but to cleanse us from unrighteousness. He removes the impurity from our hearts. We no longer have to be bitter, or envious, or jealous, or proud, or hateful. We can rule over these things, not because we have power within ourselves, but because we have a Savior who conquered sin on the cross. He has broken the power of sin, and now He is our master. We are no longer slaves to sin, but have been set free to be vessels of life. This brings us to the other side of this truth about the tongue.

Just as our tongues can be used to distribute great destruction and harm, our tongues have the potential to be a great source of blessing and life to others. For example, as we speak the truth of God's Word, we can actually bring the very life and salvation of God to a person through the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus said in Matthew 12:35 that the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him. As Christ cleanses our hearts of wickedness, we need to replace that void with good things. We need to be storing good things in our hearts. Our minds and our hearts need to be full of encouragement, and kindness, and hope. We need to bring words of healing and life to those around us. Listen to these verses:

Prov 12:18¹⁸ Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Reckless words are words out of control. We need to set a watch on our lips, and only allow good things to pass through our lips. But we are not just called to refrain from reckless words, but to speak wisdom in the place of reckless words. As we express that wisdom from the Word of God to others, it brings healing and life to them! Look at Proverbs 18:21

Prov 18: ²¹ The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat

its fruit.

We have within our mouths the potential to produce life in lives of ourselves and those around us. As we speak the truth of God, it has the power to liberate.

By controlling our tongues, we can also stop the destruction and evil unleashed by others.

Proverbs 17:9 says He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

When we hear of a fault, weakness, or sin of a brother or sister, we have a choice to make. We can repeat the matter to others, and possibly destroy relationships and friendships, or we can choose to cover the offense, and drop it. We should do unto others as we would want them to do unto us. When you blow it, do you want it to be broadcast to others, or would you prefer to just deal with it and then move on? We can promote love and unity many times by silence and self control.

Finally, God has given us the power to overcome evil with our tongues. Listen to I Peter 3:9-12

I Peter 3: ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Whoever would love life

and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of

the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

When we are insulted, we have an opportunity to overcome evil by responding with blessing. When lashed against, we can respond in gentleness. Through our words and our response, we can defuse evil, and promote and create peace. According to this passage, when we choose this pathway of peace and blessing, God's ears are attentive to our prayers, and He is with us and on our side. Beloved, God has filled us with His mercy and love, and our lives and our mouths can become conduits to spread that to others.

We have a very powerful tool within our mouths, and we need to pray for the wisdom and grace to use it to the glory of God.