

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/11/94 PM  
James 3:9-12 "The Choice Involving Your Tongue"

**Intro:** I get a kick when I read the following account of humorous reports filed with insurance companies (Stowell, 9). "An insurance adjuster...noted the unique way that people file reports on their claims when asked to describe their accidents in the fewest words possible:

'I pulled from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed for the embankment.'

'The pedestrian had no idea which way to run, so I ran over him.'

'The guy was all over the road; I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.'

Communication is an amazing thing. Communication involves a sender, a receiver, a message, and a means by which the message is sent. Quite often for us, that means is the tongue. Tonight we're going to consider the choice involving your tongue. We have come to week 4 in our series on "Taming the Tongue."

Review: (see transparencies)

Week #1: We learned three lessons about taming the tongue, in James 3:1-2.

I. God holds me responsible for my tongue (1-2a).

II. My tongue is a barometer of my spiritual maturity (2).

What comes out of my mouth reveals what's in my heart (Matthew 12:34).

III. There is great potential in my tongue (2).

A. For bad (we can "offend")

B. For good (If we can control the tongue, we can control the whole body)

Week #2: In James 3:3-5, James helps us to understand the incredible power of our tongues by giving us three, practical illustrations.

I. Illustration #1: A small bit can turn a large horse (3).

II. Illustration #2: A small rudder can guide a large ship (4).

III. Illustration #3: A small spark can cause a large fire (5).

Implications:

1. My tongue may be petite, but it sure is powerful.

2. My tongue can boast of great things.

a. The solution is not silence.

b. The solution is control.

Tonight, we're going to delve into the topic, "The Battle of the Tongue." Why do we struggle with our tongues?

Week #3: We struggle with our tongues for three reasons, according to James 3:6-8.

I. We struggle because of what the tongue IS (6).

Five things that are true of the tongue...

II. We struggle because of what the tongue is NOT (7-8a).

A. Creatures can be tamed (7).

- B. The tongue can't be tamed (8a).
- III. We struggle because of what the tongue CONTAINS (8b).
  - A. The tongue contains evil.
  - B. The tongue contains poison.

(We considered 13 types of deadly poison in our tongues...)

In v 9, James moves from why we struggle with the tongue to the choice we must make involving our tongue.

**Proposition: If we're going to make right choices in the use of our tongues, we must understand two issues, according to James 3:9-12.**

I. We must understand the Competition (9-10).

With the same mouth...

- A. We have the potential to praise God.
- B. We have the potential to curse men.

Look out for these words... (Stowell, 17)

1. "Well, it's the truth, isn't it?"
2. "If they didn't want people to talk, they never should have done it."
3. "Let me share this with you that we might pray more intelligently."

II. We must understand the Confusion (11-12).

- A. A spring doesn't produce both fresh and salt water.
- B. A fig tree doesn't produce olives.
- C. A grapevine doesn't produce figs.
- D. A salt spring doesn't produce fresh water.
- E. A double tongue sends a confusing message.
  1. A double tongue is indicative of a divided heart.
  2. A double tongue displeases God.
  3. A double tongue discredits the gospel.

Implications: Choices we must make...

1. Choose to use your tongue to praise God (sing hymns; pray aloud).
2. Be accountable to someone who can point out the case of "double tongue."

**I. We must understand the Competition (9-10).**

Vv 9-10, "Therewith bless we God...and curse we men..." James illustrates for us the potential inconsistency in the tongue. What's his purpose? He wants us to make a decision to use our tongues in the right way. If that is to happen, we need to understand that there is built-in competition in our tongues.

Joe Stowell told the story recently of two farmers who were talking. One was a German, the other a Texan. Both were bragging, trying to outdo the other. The German asked the Texan farmer, "How much land do you own?" The Texan's head swelled a little, and he said, "Well, I hate to brag, but if I got in my pickup and drove, by the end of the day, I'd still be on my own land." To which the German replied, "Yea, I had a truck like that once."

There is competition in our tongues. James has in mind a different kind of competition in vv 9-10. With the same mouth, we have the potential to do two, competing things...

A. We have the potential to praise God.

V 9 "Therewith bless we God, even our Father." The word "bless" means "to speak well of, to praise." It's the Greek "eulogeo" from which we get our English word "eulogy."

The Jews receiving James' letter were very familiar with "blessings." Whenever the name of God was mentioned, a Jew must respond: "Blessed be He!" William Barclay observed (89-90), "Three times a day the devout Jew had to repeat the "Shemoneh Esreh," the famous eighteen prayers called 'Eulogies,' every one which began, 'Blessed be Thou, O God.'

We can use our tongues to bless and praise God. What are some ways? We praise God with our tongues when we: sing hymns and spiritual songs; share our testimony of what Christ means to us; talk on the phone and give God the glory for an answered prayer; give a devotional at the care center; say "Amen" in a church service; pray aloud in church; sing a ministry in music. There are lots of ways we can bless God with our tongues.

Here's where the competition comes in, for with the same tongue...

B. We have the potential to curse men.

V 9 "And therewith curse we men..." See the "doubleness" of the tongue, the inconsistency? Someone has said that most tongues are tied in the middle, wagging at both ends (Stowell, 16). Isn't it ironic that on the way to church we can dissect our family members with poisonous words, and then, as soon as we hit the church parking lot, we put on our pious, "church" faces, walk through the doors, and sing, "Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus our blessed redeemer"?!

Why is wrong to speak ill of our fellow man? V 9 says, "who are made after the similitude of God." Man is God's imagebearer. This is key. We have the capacity to reflect God, even to live in relationship with God. As His imagebearer, we have personality, intellect, and emotion. We can enjoy relationships. And we can speak. When we use our tongue to devalue another person, it's a slap in the face of God.

Cursing is the lowest, vilest, dirtiest form of speech. To curse someone is not merely to swear at them, but to desire that they be cut off from God and experience eternal punishment (Moo, 128). God's Word says we are never to curse another person, even if they have cursed us. "Bless those who curse you (Rom 12:14)." James is talking about using our tongues to inflict harm on another person.

What are some specific ways we "curse men"? The possibilities are nearly infinite. When we sit down to our Sunday dinner, and roast a fellow church member in our conversation, we've done it. So when we blast our youth leader, or criticise our Sunday School teacher for not "doing it the way we like."

We need to look out when we hear the following words (Stowell, 17). They are flashing red lights that word with the intent to harm are about to be uttered:

1. *"Well, it's the truth, isn't it?"*
2. *"If they didn't want people to talk, they never should have done it."*
3. *"Let me share this with you that we might pray more intelligently."*

In v 10, James drives home the point, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

"The official transcript (see Stowell, 63) of the Watergate tapes of the Nixon era were frequently interrupted by the phrase, 'Expletives deleted.' 'Expletives deleted' soon became a common term to refer to less than the best of speech. Deleting the expletives indicated that on the level of presidential prestige, 'expletives' were an unfitting reflection of the President's character."

Beloved, we are children of the King. There are some things that are unfitting for lips that belong to the King.

In v 10, James says, "My brethren." You expect more out of your family than you do a total stranger. James' counsel here is family business. If a person is not in God's family, he doesn't have the power to control his tongue, nor the power to change. But if a person IS in God's family, if he IS a brother, then a double tongue is inexcusable.

Why? James reveals one very important reason in vv 11-12. A double tongue creates great confusion. Soon after I became a Christian, at the age of 11, I remember standing in the foyer of the church with a boy who was a year older than me. He started talking about the mother of a friend of mine in a critical way, and said something like, "My mom says that lady's problem is that she's too religious." The young Christian that I was, hearing that critical statement by a Christian about another Christian created instant confusion. It just didn't seem right for one of God's people to speak ill of another. And James says, "It's not."

## **II. We must understand the Confusion (11-12).**

James loves everyday illustrations: bits, fire, animals, and now water and plants. In vv 11-12, he asks a series of rhetorical questions. "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?..." The implied answer to each question is, "No!" The point? Even inanimate objects of nature know when something's inconsistent.

For instance...

A. A spring doesn't produce both fresh and salt water.

B. A fig tree doesn't produce olives.

C. A grapevine doesn't produce figs.

D. A salt spring doesn't produce fresh water.

True, some streams and springs may produce a mixture of fresh and salt water. But not at the same time. The same spring doesn't pour forth fresh water one minute and polluted water the next. It may be good, or bad, but it's consistent. The problem with the tongue is that it's not consistent. And an inconsistent tongues sends...

E. A double tongue sends a confusing message.

Upon reflection (not so much from observation of the text), it seems to me that there are three things true of a double tongue.

*1. A double tongue is indicative of a divided heart.*

Our speech is a barometer of our spirituality. One minute Peter said, "Even if I die with You, I will not deny you (Mt 26:35)." The next the very same tongue denied Jesus with cursings (Mt 26:69-75). The John who said, "Little children, love one another," was the same one who years earlier wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village. When my tongue is double, my heart is divided. If my tongue needs spring cleaning, I must start with my heart first.

### *2. A double tongue displeases God.*

Reckless lips and a redeemed life don't belong together. John Bunyan tells us of his character "Talkative": "He was a saint abroad and a devil at home (Barclay, 90)."

I find the following remark by William Barclay to be convicting (90), "Many a man speaks with perfect courtesy to strangers and even preaches love and gentleness, and yet snaps with impatient irritability at his own family. It has not been unknown for a man to speak with piety on Sunday and to curse a squad of workmen on Monday. It has not been unknown for a man to utter the most pious sentiments one day and to repeat the most questionable stories the next. It has not been unknown for a woman to speak with sweet graciousness at a religious meeting and then to go outside to murder someone's reputation with a malicious tongue."

James says, "These things ought not so to be." The truth is this. A double tongue displeases God.

### *3. A double tongue discredits the gospel.*

Few things discredit the cause of Christ like an inconsistent tongue. If my unsaved neighbor hears me preach Christ to him on Sunday, and then blast my boss on Monday, and mock our political leaders on Tuesday, and criticise my wife on Wednesday, guess what he thinks? "That Christ he preaches I need doesn't seem to make much of a difference in his life."

Paul had this to say about widows who use their tongues in a damaging way in I Timothy 5:13, "They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not."

### **Implications: Choices we must make...**

Someone has written a thought-provoking scenario entitled, "The Lesson." You teachers will get a kick out of it. It goes like this: "Then Jesus took His disciples up the mountain, and gathering around Him, He taught them saying: 'Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are you when persecuted. Blessed are you when you suffer. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in Heaven.'

"Then Simon Peter said, 'Do we have to write this down?' And Andrew said, 'Are we supposed to know this?' And James said, 'Will we have a test on it?' And Philip said, 'What if we don't know it?' And Bartholomew said, 'Do we have to turn this in?' And John said, 'The other disciples didn't have to learn this.' And Matthew said, 'When do we get out of here?' And Judas said, 'What does this have to do with real life?'

"Then one of the Pharisees present asked to see Jesus' lesson plans and inquired of Jesus His terminal objectives in the cognitive domain.

"And Jesus wept." (from Gale Dalton, 11/9/94)

1. Choose to use your tongue to praise God (sing hymns; pray aloud).

Take some practical steps this week to praise God. Sing Christ-centered songs. Pray aloud. Speak words of encouragement to an imagebearer.

At the same time you resolve to speak words of praise, choose to reject words that would harm others. We need help in this area. So...

2. Be accountable to someone who can point out the case of "double tongue."

Only Christ can give us victory. Often the Lord uses people to help us. Give another person (must be a godly person) the right to point out when you slip up, and allow salt water to flow from your lips.