

HHBC



James

3: 5-8

POWER OF THE TONGUE

PART 1

James 3: 5-8

HHBC



1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

5 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!

6 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.

7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.



PREVIEW of James 3:5-8- Part I of the Power of the Tongue:

Epistle of James: focuses on the **PRACTICAL**: faith and works in practice, our walk through this world.

We will either walk by faith, dependent on the control of our indwelling Holy Spirit, or we will walk by sight, depending on Self, our so-called “lived experience”- our own wits, by the seat of our pants-

But, if we abide and remain in Christ practically, controlled by the Holy Spirit, we are James’s “*perfect man*” - Complete in Him and mature. Bridled and controlled, stable and not “stumbling”. This is matching our standing in Christ to our state of earthly being.

Today’s passage focuses on the great power and influence of the **tongue**. It too, is either unbridled and unleashed in the Adamic state, or tamed, bridled and peaceable by the Spirit, depending on which indwelling power controls. The mature Christian will always be abiding and rooted in Christ’s life. Abiding in self will let loose its destructive power.

But we are given the Standard:



... under the greatest stress of trial that could possibly be conceived, a trial which went on to the awful death which the Lord suffered, "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth*"—He was perfect master of Himself under all circumstances. And again, as the prophet [Isaiah] bears witness, while on the one hand "*He had done no violence,*" on the other "*neither was there any deceit in His mouth.*" Violence comes from the abuse of power; deceit is the resource of weakness. In the Lord there could be neither. The perfect trial was but perfect manifestation of supreme excellence. His was unique obedience to the will of God, while accompanied at the same time with perfection of another kind, which made Him able to realize all the weakness of which He was the subject, He to whom sin was suffering only, and the sorest possible suffering, even to the bearing of its heavy burden upon the tree.

F.W. GRANT: COMMENTARY ON JAMES, CH. 3; PP. 206-207; THE NUMERICAL BIBLE, THIRD ED., 1903, LOIZEAUX BROS.; BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT, N.Y.



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!

James 3:5

1. Immediate context of Vs. 5: *Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires*
 - a) This third metaphor: the tongue being a small spark was preceded by: 1. the tongue as a horse's bit, and 2. the tongue as a ship's rutter

2. **“The tongue is a fire”**: this definitive statement in Verse 6 is what James is working towards—
 - a) Crux of James's point is that the tongue has **propellant** ability- a **kindling** ability to become a large conflagration
 - b) War, fighting, disputes can be the result
 - c) Paul has a list: you can see how the tongue is easily the spark of things he warns believers about: *strife, jealousy, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; enmities, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, abusive language, evil suspicions, foolish controversies and genealogies.... Gal. 5:20, 1 Tim 1:4, 6:4, Titus 3:9*
 - d) Not in the least: in this verse 5: **boasting**- a tongue-using sin of the flesh...



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.

James 3:6

1. The tongue is 2 things: (1) a fire, ***pyr*** - And (2) a world of iniquity (KJV)
 - a) The tongue is: a destructive element that consumes things (think the big 2021 Marshall Fire; 2020 Cameron Peak Fire)
 - b) The tongue is: a sum total of iniquity = ***adikia*** (righteous = dikaios). Iniquity is the same word for Righteousness: is morally justified; straight, virtuous, right-standing vis a vis God's moral standard. The '***a***' prefix negates all positive righteousness.

2. '***The tongue is set among our members as that with defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell***' – Wuest has “the tongue is so constituted in [the members of our body] that it defiles the entire body and sets on fire our *round of existence* and is constantly being set on fire by Ghenna”
 - a) See again: the fueling propellant quality of the tongue at work:
 - b) 'sets on fire' is ***phlogizō*** (ignite; burn up; operate destructively)
 - c) Defiles – ***spiloō*** to spot; to spill something as to stain an unspotted, perfect garment

3. Summary- the tongue is an unholy, hell-raising hell-fire when controlled sinfully by our Old Self....
 - a) Extra credit: what part of the body do all officials in Washington D.C. use most?



For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

James 3:7,8

1. At first, the taming of every species: seems at first to relate to Gen. 1:26: *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*
 - a) or to: Psa. 8:6 - *You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet;*; but this 'taming' in James seems to refer to something stronger, more forceful-
 - b) Verse 8's **Taming**: not as in taming a horse or pet: the word tame is **damazō**; as in restraining; curbing; subduing; as in the demonic man in Mark 5 (Legion); no one was able to subdue his wilding, demonic outbursts even breaking his shackles and chains...
 - c) Wuest has: every creature on land in the sea is controlled and has been controlled by mankind; but no one in the human race is able to control the tongue
 - d) Wuest also adds: **unstable** evil to 'restless evil' in verse 8- and this seems to tie into the demonic man in Mark 5 nicely.
 - e) Added observation: Jesus Himself was able to control the demons named Legion in the man.
 - f) And so: this 'taming' suggests a much stronger flavor to subdue the diabolical...



For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. **8** But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

James 3:7,8

2. H.A. Ironside says of it: *All species and varieties of birds and beasts, even slimy serpents and creatures of the sea, have been tamed by patient handling and attention. But no man can tame his own tongue.*
 - a) I tend to disagree with this use of ‘tamed’ especially as he says patient handling and attention; that is saying the tongue is tameable like a house pet to me with proper care...
 - b) Do you agree that ‘tame’ has more of a meaning of to *subdue / curb / restrain forcefully* – what I am positing this morning? Or do you think it’s more of Ironside’s taming by method of ‘*patient handling*’ and careful ‘*attention*’?
3. Not that we are to exert self-effort in taming, subduing, restraining, putting a choke hold on our tongue; that is a lost cause. We need to wait for the answer in later verses— e.g. verse 11’s discussion of what is the spring-source of what comes out of our souls to animate the tongue (next week)



RELATED O.T. Verses

- *Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.* Prov. 21:23
- Re: the wicked: *His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.* Psa 10:7
- *You let your mouth loose in evil . And your tongue frames deceit.* Psa 50:19
- *Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.* Ps 52:2
- *You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.* Ps 52:4
- *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.* Prov 18:21
- *The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue . Is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.* Prov 21:6
- *Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble; And dry grass collapses into the flame, So their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; For they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts; And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.* Isa 5:24
- In the O.T.: the 'tongue' is used 85 times in 85 verses [110 total in the Bible]:
- In the N.T.: it's 25 times in 24 verses: Three uses: (1): 8 times in I Cor. related to the gift of tongues; (2): in a positive sense "every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:9-11); (3): the 4 verses in we have in James; and (4) in Revelation: only used in relation to tongues (languages) and nations...



The Tongue: *by Phillips Burrows Strong*

Boneless tongue, so small and weak, ***“The tongue Can crush and kill,”*** declares the Greek.
“The tongue destroys a greater hoard,”
 The Turk asserts, ***“than does the sword.”***

A Persian proverb wisely saith,
“A lengthy tongue—an early death”;
 Or sometimes takes this form instead,
“Don't let your tongue cut off your head.”

“The tongue can speak a word whose speed,”
 The Chinese say, ***“outstrips the steed”*** ;
 While Arab sages this impart,
“The tongue's great storehouse is the heart.”

From Hebrew wit this maxim sprung,
“Though feet should slip, ne'er let the tongue.”
 The sacred writer crowns the whole,
“Who keeps his tongue doth keep his soul!”



Some Final Thoughts on the Power of the Tongue:

From J. Vernon McGee:

- "the tongue is more toxic than hydrochloric acid"
- "the tongue is the most dangerous weapon in the world"
- "It takes a baby 2 years to learn to talk and 50 years to learn to keep his mouth shut."
- "It was a miracle in Balaam's day for an ass to speak, and today it's a miracle for one to keep quiet..."