

Taming the Tongue

By Bill Scheidler

Introduction

Let's take a **straw poll** this morning and see if we are in the right place.

- Who would like to experience a good life filled with many more good days than bad days?
- Who would like to keep as far away from troubled thoughts and a tormented mind as possible?
- Who would like to preserve their life from all potential destruction?

What if I told you that there is a very small thing that you must control and you could achieve what you desire.

That small thing is the tongue. Listen to what the Bible says...

Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Psalm 34:12-13

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. Proverbs 21:23

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. Proverbs 13:3

James had something to say about the tongue (Jam. 3:1-12). James was one of the only lead pastors to write a book of the Bible. For this reason, his letter is full of practical issues that affect every local church. This is what he said about the tongue...

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. 3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

A. James indicated that that even though the tongue is small in comparison to the rest of a person's body, it is a most powerful force.

1. Just like a small bit in the mouth of a large horse it is able to rein in or control the whole body.
2. Just like the small rudder of a massive ship it is able to set the course of a person's journey.
3. Just like a single spark or small flame it is able to set on fire the course of nature and burn down what took years to develop.

As with fire when it is harnessed it can be a source of great blessing. However, when it is not harnessed it can become an instrument of hell itself leaving death and destruction in its path.

Someone has said of the tongue, "It's the only tool that grows sharper with constant use."

B. James indicated that the tongue is a most difficult member to tame.

Every kind of animal has been tamed and brought under the control of man. The tongue is more difficult to tame than all of them.

C. James indicated that the tongue can be a source of great blessing and life or it can be a source of cursing and death.

1. On the blessing side it can be a spring of living water to bring refreshment for many. With it we can bless God.
2. On the cursing side it can be a stagnant pool of bitter or salt water—a world of iniquity, full of deadly poison. With it we can curse those who have been made in the image of God.

The tongue is a powerful force for good or evil.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 18:21

A. On the positive side

- It promotes life, health and peace
- It is an instrument of kindness
- It nourishes and feeds people
- It imparts grace to the hearers
- It brings deliverance

B. On the negative side

- It can pour forth foolishness

- It can break a person's spirit
- It can bring division
- It can stir up strife and envy
- It can destroy people

There are at least twenty one negative uses of the tongue as described in the Bible. Some of these include the following:

- Talebearing
- Hasty or Rash Words
- Idle Words
- Cursing
- Reviling
- Backbiting
- Gossip or Whispering
- Slander or Malice
- Unwholesome, Rotten or Worthless Communication
- Bitterness
- Course Jesting
- Complaining
- Arguing
- Filthy Language
- Lying
- Flattery
- Godless Chatter
- Sowing Discord

A key verse in this context is Proverbs 6:12-19

Here is a description of worthless and wicked people: They are constant liars, signaling their true intentions to their friends by making signs with their eyes and feet and fingers. Their perverted hearts plot evil. They stir up trouble constantly. But they will be destroyed suddenly, broken beyond all hope of healing. There are six things the LORD hates--no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord among brothers. Proverbs 6:12-19, NLT

Most of the things on this list of things that the Lord detests are somehow linked to our use of the tongue. I think it is clear how important it is for us to tame the tongue.

While James seemed to indicate that no one can tame the tongue (Jam. 3:8), that which is impossible for men is possible with God (Luke 18:27).

There are six important keys to taming the tongue.

A. First, in order to tame the tongue we must have a desire to tame the tongue.

Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. Psalm 17:3, NIV

This means:

1. Acknowledging and repenting of past failures.
2. Asking God for help to change.
3. Taking responsibility for the hurtful things that we have said to others.
4. Apologizing to those we have offended by our words.
5. Asking others to help us identify offensive speech patterns.

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Proverbs 27:17

- B. Second, in order to tame the tongue we must pay special attention in conversation (Mt. 12:36).

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. Proverbs 13:3

This means:

1. Thinking before we speak.

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Psalms 141:3

2. Listening to our words through the ears of others before we speak.

...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak... James 1:19

3. Discerning the reactions of others before, during and after we speak.

This includes both verbal responses and body language.

- C. Third, in order to tame the tongue we must deal with our mind.

1. We must understand that what comes out of our mouth is actually a reflection of what is in our heart and mind.

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Matthew 12:34-37

2. We must understand that our mind and our mouth are somehow connected (Rom. 10:10).

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

Joshua 1:8

3. We must have right meditations.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

- D. Fourth, in order to tame the tongue we must be willing to test our words before we speak them.

The eightfold test for the tongue is the same as that of our thoughts (Phil. 4:8).

1. Is it true? Will it give an accurate impression?
2. Is it honorable? Should it be imitated by others?
3. Is it right? Is it appropriate to say at this time?
4. Is it pure? Is it motivated by pride or selfishness?
5. Is it lovely? Will it brighten the lives of those who hear it?
6. Is it of good repute? Will it damage anyone's reputation?
7. Is it characterized by excellence? Will it motivate others to be excellent?
8. Is it worthy of praise? Will it edify all who hear it?

--Adapted from Bill Gothard, *Instructions for Our Most Important Battle*

- E. Fifth, in order to tame the tongue we must be not receive an evil report that is carried by others.

The truth is we are all vulnerable because there is something in all of us that enjoys hearing about the dirt on someone else.

The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

Proverbs 18:8

Satan uses evil reports:

- To discredit spiritual leadership.
- To cause Christians to close their spirit to each other.
- To multiply conflicts and produce more ungodliness.
- To undermine the work of Christ in the world today.

There are some questions you can ask a carrier before listening to their report:

- What is your reason for telling me?
- Where did you get your information?
- Have you gone to those directly involved?

- Have you personally checked out all of the facts?
 - Can I quote you if I check this out for myself?
 - Would you be willing to write down your comment and sign it?
- F. Sixth, in order to tame the tongue we must cleanse ourselves from the defilement caused by evil reports that we have entertained.

We cleanse ourselves of an evil report by doing the following:

1. Asking God to cleanse our mind from the evil report.
2. Asking God to give you a genuine love for the person involved in the report.
3. Refusing to tell another soul about the matter.
4. Talking to others that you may have contaminated.
5. Talking to the one who contaminated you.
6. If necessary seek out spiritual authorities to properly handle related matters.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14