

# Notes on James Chapter 3: The Tongue

By James West

(v. 1) Oh how we love to be seen and noticed! Jesus did not so. Isa 42:2: 'He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.' All those that desired the mastery before Him, and the antichrist of the last days must use the tongue to gain a platform for themselves and their own lusts to be served. Not so the Lord Jesus. He was meek and mild, and all His words were health. Whether spoken in secret, or declared to the masses, He sought truth and love should gain mastery over the hearts, before even that He should be crowned King in the earth. Men who would use the tongue to make a way for themselves do not have rule over their own spirits, and are not truly mighty. Prov 16:32: '...He that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city.

(vv. 2-5) If only we realised how powerful the tongue is, then we should see the importance of harnessing it for great good, rather than giving it free rein from a sinful heart to achieve much evil and wreckage. God knows every word that is in our tongues. Too often our mouths are like loaded guns, and loose cannons, rolling around the deck of a ship, fuses burning, ready to fizz and fire in any direction, with mindless purpose and random results. By His words, Jesus has bowed the hearts of men throughout history's long train to see, understand, and submit themselves to the rule of Heaven's kingdom. By the use of the tongue, His words, emblazoned upon the pages of Scripture, inscribed on the memories of men, resounded from pulpits, and relayed in private conversation, have converted countless sinners from the errors of their ways, and covered a multitude of sins. The destinies of kingdoms, and the futures of generations have been guided away from destruction, and toward peace, because of the words that Jesus spoke. Whoever rehearses them today continues to sow preserving salt and saving light in this darkened world. Oh the power of the tongue!

Consider the power of the spoken or printed word, to sway the hearts of kings and leaders. If we could but recognise the power of words for good, then we might gather them up as so much water that is wasted, and save it for best use, either in private or public ear, or for printed page. We would spare our words, so as not to be open faucets, long forgotten, and proclaiming forth every passion and torrent of our empty minds! May God enable us to lay up knowledge, and to then to keep it safe unto those opportunities when it may achieve the most good. In every generation, there must be men and women – mouth-pieces of God, whether in the public eye, or in the humble home, which will continue to propagate the heirloom seeds of wisdom, and not a cluttered assortment of weedy foolishness.

(v. 6) The tongue is most immediately connected to what is in a man's heart. Whatever is within proceeds forth from the mouth, and if evil, not only ruins the hearers, but also the speaker. The more anger in his speech, the more angry will be his heart, the more lewd his speech, the more lustful he will become, the more careless his speech, the more thoughtless he will become generally. The tongue is like the bit in the horse's mouth, or like the helm of the ship. Wheresoever the speaker channels his verbiage, thither will his heart proceed also. His mouth teaches his heart, whereas the 'The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.' (Prov 16:23)

By His words, Jesus set in motion deep yearnings, silent heart-workings, and extensive soul-searchings. The outflow of verbal goodness was deliberate and effectual to change the course of

men's minds. The beginnings may have been slow, but the end has been far-reaching, as when one finds a gently flowing spring, and traces it down the ranges until it becomes a thunderous torrent. However, one sinner can cause much destruction, and his cunning words can create anarchy and destruction in a moment. Surely it is painstaking to bridle the tongue, and to harness it for quiet, gentle, and disciplined work, and yet if we do not, our tongues will take free rein and tear down all the good we hope to achieve and more.

If we truly understood what a cage-full of evil birds our tongues can be, and how flammable they are in company, we would tremble and watch vigilantly, lest any poison should suddenly shoot from our lips! But, brethren, what a fearful and tenuous protection that would be to us, if that were all we had! It would be little protection at all, for the flesh is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There must be a humbling to God of our spirits (4:6), and a submitting to Him (v. 7). There must be a drawing nigh unto Him, and a cleansing of our heart and hands (v. 8). It is the lusts that war in our members which present the entire source of difficulty (v. 1). It is a secret friendship with the world which fuels the tongue's fire (v. 4). Therefore, it is impossible that the tongue can bring forth contaminated words, if the heart itself be not contaminated with the love of worldliness.

(vv. 7-12) It is true that a tongue tethered to a carnal heart cannot be tamed, for that is what the Scriptures are here saying. But get the heart regenerated and cleansed, and the tongue will bring forth sweet and healthful words. Our Lord's speech was always pure, and the Father delighted to hear His speech. 'Hear ye Him!' said the Father, showing what great pleasure He took in His faithful Servant-Son. Grace is poured into His lips, and the oil of gladness is upon His head, for He hates wickedness, and loves righteousness. There is nothing forward or perverse in His mouth, for there is no skerrick of impurity in His heart. What great need we have to be sanctifyingly cleansed by Him, and to learn of Him!

Jesus never used His words carelessly, brutishly, or cruelly. He had come to lead many sons unto glory, and a rough tongue had no place in His purposes. He saw each human as created in His own image, and His design was to bring them into a family covenant. Each fallen man could be a brother, and each fallen woman a sister. There was no place for curling and cutting the air above their heads with a tongue-whip, as if to gain the mastery over them! 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...' were the gracious words that proceeded from His mouth. Even in His verbal contests with the Pharisees, it was to rebuke and restore, to expose and deliver. His spirit was in earnest for the souls of humanity, and His tongue was no less so.

(vv. 13-) The wisest man among sinners will yet be careful in the use of His tongue. We see that even Jesus was not always quick to answer, though it was impossible that He could speak evil. A wise man knows full well that it is possible to speak convincingly of religious affections, and to have seven abominations in the heart still. He will therefore not plunge like a war-horse into all contention 'mouth-first', but will maintain a good example, and meekness toward all men, for if he has no rule over his own spirit, his might is no better than that of a wilful and headstrong tyrant. If Christ was the supreme example of meekness, then how much more ought we to demonstrate the same to all men?

A man may have a point, and yet have no heart for those he seeks to convince. His communication and ministry will be full of confusion. Jesus knew what his disciples needed to learn about servanthood, but rather than despise and berate them for their idleness and self-conceited pride, He taught

them peacefully through his example of foot-washing, and that in a manner which communicated the utmost meekness and affection toward them.



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