

The “Fiery” Member

Some people carry instruments of life and death with them everyday. For example, policemen wear loaded guns and physicians wield powerful drugs. These people have a keen sense of responsibility. Certainly such powerful instruments should never be put into the hands of a foolish, immature, or irresponsible person. Likewise, everyone of us carries and wields another kind powerful instrument everyday. Unfortunately, this instrument is not reserved for only the wise, mature, and responsible person. The instrument that I am referring to is the human tongue. A thoughtful and kind tongue can encourage the weak and exhort the wayward. It can give life! A foolish and malicious tongue can destroy personalities and reputations. It can kill! All of us need to feel a keen sense of responsibility for the use of our tongues.

Of all the things that can get us into trouble, I guess our words top the list. It is much easier to provoke someone with what you say than it is with what you do. The old proverb, “It’s easier said than done” has some truth to it after all! A few small words that are carelessly spoken can create discord and hostility between brethren. It is amazing that it takes so little effort stir up major problems in a congregation.

The apostle James charged the brethren that the way to “perfection” is through control of the tongue. He says, *“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body”* (3:2). “Perfect” means mature, or full of moral and spiritual growth. The one who has learned true control of the tongue is worthy of being called mature or perfect.

Proverbs 18:21 says, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”* The tongue is capable of doing great good. Proverbs 15:4, 23 say, *“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life ... a word spoken in due season, how good is it.”* However, the tongue is also capable of doing great harm. Psalm 39:1 says, *“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.”*

The two examples used in James 3, the horse’s bit and the ship’s rudder, should impress upon us the influence and power of the tongue. Though a bit is only a small piece of metal, it is able to completely control the body. Likewise, a ship is driven by great and powerful winds, but the pilot can control its direction by using a small rudder. See how easy it is for our

lives to be guided by such a small instrument!

The tongue is indeed a mighty instrument. James says, "*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell*" (3:6). We can literally end friendships and make mortal enemies with just a few words from the tongue. It really strikes me that such a seemingly insignificant "member" can be so powerful and dangerous. James further said, "*But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*" (3:8).

We could probably spend all day thinking about the "evils" of the tongue. Moreover, we could spend hours devising ways in which the tongue could be used for evil purposes. Yet, Paul taught in several places that gossip, slandering, boastfulness and arrogance are all evil uses of the tongue. Think about how many times a day we are inclined to say the wrong kinds of things.

Everyday, some of us use our tongues to talk about our brethren, to curse and swear, to take God's name in vain, to promote jealousy, rivalry, envy, etc. James said, "*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be*" (3:10). It sickens me to see us use our tongues in this manner!

I know how easy it is to slip in a few words here and there about other people. It catches you before you know it. James' point is that with our mouths we bless God but then we turn right around and curse men; who have been made in the likeness or image of God. We need to be a people who are consciously aware at all times of what we say and how we use our tongues. God gave us this "instrument" to do good, not to "*bite and devour one another*" (Galatians 5:15).

Paul taught in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*" God wants us to have the kind of love that builds us up, not tears us down. The answer to using our tongues correctly comes down to the point of love. Do we love each other enough to look out for one another? Do we love each other enough to want to build up and edify? Do we love each other and God enough to obey the command Paul gave? I hope your answer is yes.

When people get to gossiping and not looking out for each other, catastrophe will be the ultimate result. I wonder how many of the Lord's churches have been destroyed by the "fiery" member? It can get out of

control so easily. Listen to Paul as he says, "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ...*" (Colossians 3:17). Are you doing it?

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