

## Our Tongue A Restless Evil

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:1-12)

God is often emphatic with the words of truth and instruction that He gives to us. But seldom is He as emphatic about a matter as He is here with these words of warning about the nature of our tongue. Here, over and over again, God gives simple and plain-speaking examples of the problems that each of us, without exception, has with the hazards of an uncontrolled tongue.

Words that are said are so very important to God. For me to even have to say that at all is an understatement. But words truly are important to God! "Words" can do things and can make things happen, both good things and evil things.

Recall that the "Spoken Word" is actually the Name given to the Second Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus. And it is through the "Words" spoken into these scriptures that God gives us an understanding of His very being. Though we aren't able to see God with our eyes, through the power of God's Holy Spirit,

and through the use of His “Words” here in the scriptures, He reveals Himself and we are able to “see” our God in “vivid majesty”. Through His words, we can see the “beauty of His Holiness”! What a joy!

But unfortunately, for you and me, and for all of mankind, such righteous handling of “words” is not so easy. As these scriptures before us today tell us, our “words” can be powerful in very wrong ways. “Words” that you and I utter are able to bring about great misery and all sorts of “evil”. And the evil effects of our “words” can, and often do, linger out there for many years, never ceasing to cause harm, continuing, sometimes daily, to roil within the memories of our loved ones. Oh, how I do wish that some of my words would go away and be forgotten!

And you and I are often blinded to the real truth about our words. We naively think ourselves to be able to say good and right things to, and about, each other. But as we read these scriptures, and as we humble ourselves about the realities of our heart, we realize that our ability to open our mouths and say really good and righteous words is severely limited, able to say really good and righteous things only when the Holy Spirit enables us. Otherwise, we are helpless in our use of words.

May I pause and ask, do the things I am saying to us sound too harsh, even condemning? And why would I come to this conclusion? It's because of warnings such as these that we have just read. And folks, God is talking about you and me. Listen again! Verse 6,

6 . . . the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. (James 3:6)

Wow! And listen to verse 8,

8 . . . no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:8-10)

Wow again folks! This is a very serious indictment, pronounced to us from the very mouth of God! But again, why does God say such things to us and about us? . . . It is because He knows us well. He knows each one of us intimately. And He knows every thought that we think. He knows such things about us as those we find in Romans chapter 3. And please understand that these words are not just general statements about people. God intends for us to apply them personally, to ourselves. Listen to those words!

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of vipers is under their lips"; (Romans 3:10-13)

Again! What an indictment! Do we notice here folks, that God does not abide by the rules given to us by modern-day phycologists, even some of our modern-day "Christian" phycologists? Those folks instruct us emphatically to never say such things to people, that we must always, always "affirm" people. And not only "affirm" their person, but also affirm their behaviors. Else, their "feeling" might get damaged, and we might cause them some form of long-term emotional problems.

And yes, those things might take place. But folk, be that as it may, we must give God's words exactly as they are given within these scriptures, because His words are true and correct and honest, and yes, very loving, as He tells us the truth about ourselves. God is our loving Father, and He loves us so much that He will always be perfectly honest in His assessment of us, of our character and of our behavior.

And he purposefully gives us all these scriptures to make us aware of who we really are, and of our shortcomings. And He especially makes us aware that when you and I open our mouths and give our own personal opinions about matters, we do often say wrong things. And the reason why we, so often, say wrong things is that we truly are "totally depraved", "depraved" at the very

core of our being, beginning with our heart! Listen to the words of Jeremiah 17:9!

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

And when our heart is this corrupt, what else can we expect to come out from it! In Matthew 15, Jesus tells us

18 ". . . the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 "These are the things which defile the man." (Matthew 15:17-20 (NASB)

Folks, the words that come out from your and my mouths, come from our heart. And here, Jesus is warning us that our heart is not the innocent and trustworthy source that we think it to be. It is instead a haven for all sorts of evil thoughts, evil plans and behaviors.

You and I really do have a naturally recurring problem, one that was bred into our human condition at birth. Our hearts are desperately wicked, and from out of our desperately wicked hearts flow all manner of defiling conversation and behavior. And left unchanged from its inborn condition, our heart and our tongue will continue to spew forth every one of these things that Jesus spoke about here . . . evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and slanders. Simply put, and as the old saying goes, "we have met the enemy, and it is us!"

Consider for a moment . . . conversations, by nature, involve at least two people, often more. And each person's mind and personality is involved in the matters that are being discussed. While one is talking, the others are listening and receiving the things that are being said. And along with the words that are being said, are other contributing factors, voice inflections, mannerisms and expressions, all adding up to what will become the understanding, or the misunderstanding of the things being said.

Often, many of the people involved in the conversation are in general agreement about the matter being discussed. But just as often, one or more of those who are listening are not in full agreement. And a disagreement can arise from any of several points of difference, and again, not just from the words that are spoken, our voice inflections and mannerisms add to the words being spoken, provoking anger and resentment.

And again, the warning goes to a level deeper than our tongue. The real source of all that flows forth from our tongue is our "heart". And while many of us may have genuine intentions, we still have this corrupt condition within us. Our,

9 ". . . heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

And while we may have no intention whatsoever of being unkind or offensive, our heart may still have its own way, cleverly inserting little cuts or jabs or other criticisms. And those things immediately influence the other people in the conversation, provoking their own "deceitful and desperately wicked heart" to receive your words, either in agreement or to take offense. And then problems begin to develop, and disagreements foment.

Again, you might not really intend any offense. It is just your normal way of "giving your opinion" about a matter. But your words, or voice inflections or mannerisms touch a raw nerve, and the things you say become the small spark that ignites the flames of hurt and offense.

It is as the words of this passage suggests, our tongues breathe out the breath of our soul and our hearts are so desperately wicked and deceitful that we ourselves aren't able to fathom the depth of our own depravity. And just a random conversation can then become that small spark that will ignite flames of discord, flaring into destructive arguments that we might never get back under control. As in the example here in this passage, our tongue can become like the small rudder that is able to direct the course of a giant ship. Our words can take us down a path that we will wish we had never traveled, broken hearts, broken relationships, broken marriages.

So then, with all that being said about all the many words we say each day, and also the manner in which we say them, may we understand exactly what we are dealing with! It is this. "Our words really do have power", real power, power to heal and to help, but also, the power to hurt and to do harm. And unfortunately, far too often, the words that pour forth out of our mouths "do harm". But what are we to do, because talking is such a necessary part of our nature!

First of all, and praise be to God, He has already given us the first and most vitally important part of the answer to our dilemma of the "deceitfulness" and "desperate wickedness" spoken about in Jeremiah 17:9. He has provided us with "redemption". Praise be to God!

In His great love for us, God sent His Son to be the "perfect sacrifice" to provide the "propitiation", that is necessary to pay the penalty for our sinfully wretched souls. And all we have to do is "receive" His gift of "atonement" into our "desperately wicked" heart, and then the cleansing and healing of our soul can begin.

God described this precious gift for us in Ezekiel 36. May I read that for us? Listen beginning in verse 26, He tells us . . .

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

This is the way it all can begin within us. But it really must be done exactly this way. There is no other way for us to move from the wretched condition that we came into this life with than this. God must do all of the work. It is "His Way", and it is the "only way" to get down to the very core of our sinfulness.

And did you notice from these words that God does not have a "renovation plan". Contrary to popular belief and preaching, God does not "renovate" you and me. No, in Christ, the "old man", the "old self" must "die", die completely,

and a whole “new man”, a whole “new woman” must be born within us. Those words from 2 Corinthians 5:17,

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The old man, the old self, the old heart is removed, and a new heart is put within us. And then a new spirit is put within us and then, thanks be to God, He puts His Spirit within our spirit, making all things new.

And for us, a “new life” begins. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, God tells us that is it of Him that Christ is in us wisdom, holiness, righteousness and redemption. What a treasure! And with all of this taking place, you and I have everything we need for life and godliness. And it is then, and only then that we can open our mouths and good things, truly good things, can begin to come forth out of it. Praise be to God!

And what a joy it is as we “abide in Christ”. I must confess that I am continually surprised at some of the thoughts that come into my mind and then come out of my mouth. Where once, it seemed only foolishness that poured out from me, now, at least some of the time, I hear loving and kind and generous words coming out from my mouth. Praise be to God!

So then, can your tongue, can my tongue ever be tamed? NO! But YES! But only after it has become new! As we become “new creatures” in Christ, our heart becomes new, our spirit becomes new, and along with those, our tongues also become new.

Do our tongues then become perfect in all that they say? Unfortunately, No! But Thanks be to God, they now have an option! In the Book of Romans, we are told that in our unsaved condition, we do not have a choice. We must obey the mastery of our sinful nature.

But thanks be to God, there in Romans, we are also assured that, once we are saved, sin no longer has actual control over us and over our tongue. We now

have a “choice”. And while our “old self” does often rise up and want to say all those wrong things to people, we really don’t ever have to obey our old nature again. We never again have to become that “out of control tongue”, “that restless evil, “setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.” We now have Christ and His indwelling presence. And with His “abiding presence”,

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

(2 Peter 1:3-4)