



“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver,” Proverbs 25:11

Flaming Tongues

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to take positive steps to make their tongues instruments of righteousness.

L342. Date: June 1976. **Text:** James 3:1-14. **Topic:** Tongue.

“God gave man two ears and one tongue that he might hear twice as much as he speaks.” The believer, therefore, should watch his words! Jesus warned that men will account to God for their words, particularly for their idle (careless, useless, thoughtless) words, Matthew 12:36. No wonder the Bible warns, “. . . **Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak . . .**” James 1:19. No wonder the Psalmist prayed, “**Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips,**” Psalm 141:3.

The tongue is a common means to express what is in the heart. “**A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh,**” Luke 6:45. A man tells what he is by what he says. Words determine what one's life is like. Evil words bring sorrow and regret. Wholesome words bring life and joy. The Holy Spirit wants men to know that, so He inspired Simon Peter to write, “. . . **He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile,**” I Peter 3:10.

Today's study is entitled “Flaming Tongues.” It indicates that the tongue speaks when inspired (“set on fire”) by some force outside itself. Is your tongue set on fire by the Holy Spirit of God or by the forces of hell? You can answer that question as the study continues. The lesson aims to help you take positive steps to make your tongue an instrument of righteousness.

I. INSTRUCTION

The tongue can be used in the blessed ministry of teaching. Thank God for those faithful men and women who have dedicated their lives to teach the Word of God. Be warned, however, that teaching is a solemn thing with God.

Teachers who are full of divine wisdom are needed, verse 13. Each person who approaches the office of teaching in the church should be sure that is where God has gifted him to serve, Romans 12:6, 7; Ephesians 4:11.

There is a solemn judgment awaiting each teacher; a more strict judgment, in fact, than awaits other Christians, James 3:1. James warned all would-be teachers of that solemn truth. Jesus said, **“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 5:19. If one is a teacher, he should be careful of what and how he teaches. If he is a learner, he should give great respect and prayer to his teacher. The teacher will give solemn account to God.

The tongue can be used in teaching. It is not the only means of teaching, of course, but it is a very vital way. Any instruction concerning the use of the tongue must include some reference to speaking in relation to teaching.

From reference to the use of the tongue by teachers, James turned to a discussion of every person's use of his tongue. Not just teachers, but everyone else is responsible to God for what he says and does.

II. DISCIPLINE

How can you tell whether you are spiritually mature? A good measure is, “How well do you discipline your tongue?” James 3:2 teaches that all offend. Whether intentional or unintentional, believers are occasionally the cause of an offence. He who is able to discipline his tongue, that he does not cause offence by what he says, is a mature person; he is able to control his whole being, for he has real manhood. The believer should guard his tongue, therefore, more carefully than any other part of his being, so that he does not cause an offence with it. Even when conduct is upright and motives are pure, the tongue can still slip into sin.

The believer in Christ Jesus can control his tongue, but he must pay the price of unceasing vigilance. He should watch out for bits of gossip which are so easy to remember and repeat. He should watch out for biting and

sarcastic statements which leave a sting that long endures. He should watch out for half-truths or insinuations which leave the wrong meaning in the minds of those who hear. He should watch out for off-color jokes which defile the mind and lead into sin. The control of his tongue should indicate his devotion to Jesus Christ.

A disciplined tongue speaks words which are profitable. **“Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones,”** Proverbs 16:24. Therefore, **“Let all . . . evil speaking be put away from you . . .”** Ephesians 4:31. You can control your words. If you love God above all else and love your neighbor as yourself, your tongue will be under divine discipline all the time. **“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man,”** Colossians 4:6.

III. POWER

The tongue has power. It is able to set the direction of one's life. That is surprising, since the human tongue weighs only about six ounces. The influence of the tongue far exceeds its relative size among members of the body.

Small things often exercise great influence in life. The small metal bit in the mouth of a horse can control and turn about a great and spirited animal. The helm of a ship is extremely small in view of the size of the vessel, but it turns the course of the whole ship. The tongue is small in relation to the body, but it sets the course of life. That is what James said in verses three through five.

It is difficult to control an organ with such power. Difficulty should not discourage diligence, however. Christians are careful to keep control because so much is at stake in their lives. Besides personal reputation, they represent the kingdom of God. The very fact that the tongue is difficult to control makes it even more imperative that each believer work constantly at the task. Praise the Lord, the believer can get the help of God and gain the victory!

History records how nations have gone to war, churches have been rent by schisms, families have broken apart, and dearest friends have parted because of an uncontrolled tongue. Though the tongue is small, it is not insignificant in human affairs.

The use or misuse of the tongue can bless or curse. Utterances of malignity, greed, or uncleanness will excite the lust which acts through all the bodily organs and bring universal pollution. The tongue can potentially

“defile the whole body,” verse 6. On the other hand, the right use of the tongue can purify, ennoble, strengthen, and bless. How do you use your tongue day by day?

IV. DEPRAVITY

“... The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . it defileth the whole body . . . and it is set on fire of hell . . . But the tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison,” James 3:6, 8.

The tongue of man suffers under the same depravity which blights the rest of his nature. Weakened by a warped leaning toward sin, the tongue is a ready instrument of Satan. Only as one's tongue is dedicated to the glory of God and the good of man, then watched over with unceasing vigilance, will it be kept from sin.

Perhaps a reader thinks, “I know some people whom that describes, but it does not include me. I am a Christian.” James was writing the epistle to Christians! Even the Christian is subject to Satanic influence in the use of his tongue. Let him beware!

An evil tongue is inspired of hell. On the first Christian Pentecost, the Holy Spirit set men's tongues aflame with divine enablement so that they preached the gospel in many languages theretofore unknown. Satan has access to the control faculty of the tongue the same as does the Holy Spirit. If any man agrees to submit his mind to Satan, the very tongue which can bless men and glorify God will be used to curse both. The undisciplined, or un sanctified, tongue is inspired by the demonic forces of hell. The Christian should stay on guard.

The Bible says of the un sanctified, **“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues have they used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips,”** Romans 3:13. No wonder God will call men to account to Him for their speech.

“How appalling the thought should be to the careless talker, the man of unchastened lips, that his words are really Satan's, for which yet he himself is responsible; that his utterances are doing on himself and those around him the devil's work; that, when he pours forth from his lips profane, or impure, or unkind language, he is, in truth, breathing out flames lighted from the bottomless pit!” — Robert Johnstone.

Consider the consequences of your words before you speak. Be sure you determine the source of motivation before you speak. You may be bitten

by a poisonous serpent, take an antidote for the poison, and recover; however, there is no antidote for the poison of an undisciplined tongue. The tongue is the last citadel of Satan to fall to the forces of divine grace. Be careful what you say. Let your words be God's and not Satan's, that you may bless and not curse when you speak.

V. CONTRADICTION

Here is a paradox: The same tongue which speaks praise to God speaks cursing to men made in the image of God. **“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not so to be,”** verse 10.

“In nature we never find such an anomaly. No fountain sends forth pure and brackish water from the same vent. Trees bear according to their kind, for they have but one nature. Fig trees do not produce olives, nor do grapevines bear figs . . . With the tongue it, alas, is otherwise! The same man speaks well of God and ill of man, and often fails to recognize the incongruity of his behavior” — H. A. Ironside.

Christians should control their tongues. Redemption works from the inside out, not from the outside in. If one has been born again in his spirit, he should manifest it in his body. The tongue is not in control of itself. The fleshly organ between the jaws is under the control of the human spirit. It speaks what it is required to speak by the spirit of the person. The real problem of an evil tongue, therefore, is an evil heart. Each believer in Jesus Christ has received a new heart, Ezekiel 36:26. It is a heart in which is written the laws of God, Hebrews 10:16. He should talk as one who is made anew in Christ Jesus: **“ . . . a new creature . . . ”** for whom **“ . . . old things are passed away . . . all things are become new,”** II Corinthians 5:17.

Sins of the tongue are incompatible with a true Christian life of faith and service. They are a violation of the principle of divine life in Christ. One who claims to belong to Christ should speak like one in whom He lives. When he changed masters, from Satan to Jesus, he changed life styles. The believer should live out what God has put within by His indwelling Holy Spirit.

VI. WISDOM

“Who among you is a wise and well, instructed man? Let him show by his good life that he is guided by wisdom which expresses itself in humility.” That is the admonition of the Apostle James, recorded in verse

13.

Wisdom will manifest itself. It will be seen in the form of intelligent thought. It will be seen in the form of consistent action. It will be seen in the form of proper speech. A person will soon manifest just how wise he really is.

The wise person is the person whose speech is pure. A man who must swear and use slang language indicates inferiority. He indicates that ordinary speech is not enough to make people listen with interest. He announces that he is not able to speak impressively. He has to “spice up” his language, therefore, in order to get people's attention. The Christian should let his sympathy go out to the person with such obvious feelings of inferiority. On the other hand, the man of wisdom can speak simply and still get attention. The fool uses impure speech; the wise is honorable in his conversation.

Seek true wisdom. “. . . **The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,**” James 3:17. That is the wisdom manifest in pure speech. Foul speech, on the other hand, indicates a wisdom which is “. . . **not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish,**” James 3:16. It is marked by “confusion and every evil work.” Be wise. Be pure in speech.

Have you heard God speaking to you through the study? Has he convicted you about careless language, impure words, unbecoming statements? If so, confess it to Him as any other sin. Settle the matter with Him now.

Enter a holy covenant with God to make your speech the kind which would please Him and honor the name of Christ. Resolve to be pure. Follow that resolve by constant vigilance and unceasing discipline. Pray that God will help you keep pure in motive and speech. Here is an appropriate prayer: **“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer,”** Psalm 19:14.

Questions

1. How does Luke 6:45 relate to the study?
2. What does I Peter 3:10 mean to you?
3. Why must teachers be careful of their tongue?
4. How does control of the tongue indicate spiritual maturity?
5. How can the tongue have such power over men's lives?
6. What controls the tongue?

7. Why is it necessary to discipline the tongue without ceasing?
8. How can you bring your tongue under control?
9. How can you help others have clean speech?
10. How can you use your tongue to bless men and glorify God?