

The Dangers of the Tongue

James 3:1-12

I. Introduction

In a quiet Midwest town, there lived a couple named Emma and Lucas. They had been married for ten years, and their life together had once been the epitome of happiness and harmony. However, as time passed, the strains of daily life began to take their toll on their relationship. Unspoken anxieties and frustrations simmered beneath the surface, waiting for the slightest spark to ignite a fire.

One evening Emma and Lucas found themselves in yet another argument. The subject was trivial—something about the way Lucas had forgotten to pick up the groceries Emma had requested. But this argument, like so many before it, was not truly about the groceries. It was about the unspoken disappointments and unmet expectations that had been festering in their hearts.

"How many times do I have to remind you, Lucas?" Emma's voice trembled with frustration and anger. "You never listen to me, not really. You just tune me out like I'm background noise."

Lucas, equally weary and irritable, retorted, "I do listen, Emma. But you're always nagging, always finding something to criticize. Nothing I do is ever good enough for you, is it? You're impossible to please."

The words hung in the air, sharp and cutting. Emma's eyes filled with tears, not just from the argument at hand, but from the accumulation of similar moments that had chipped away at the foundation of their marriage. "Nagging? Is that what you think I do?"

The couple stood in silence, the weight of their words pressing down on them. They had once vowed to support and cherish each other through thick and thin, but now their words had become weapons, inflicting wounds that were slow to heal. The hurt from this argument, and all those that came before it, began to manifest in their daily lives. Affection was replaced by distance, and laughter by silence.

1. What changed in Emma and Lucas's life between the first few years of marriage and their 10th?

2. What did Emma and Lucas find themselves arguing over most of the time?
3. How were the words Emma and Lucas used sharp and cutting?
4. What dangers were this couple blind to when it came to their communication with one another?

Lesson Objective – The aim of this lesson is to study five descriptions of the tongue presented in James chapter 3, so that we will have a better understanding of how dangerous our tongues can be if left uncontrolled.

II. Five Dangers of the Tongue

a. The Tongue is C_____ – James 3:1

5. How do teachers teach others?
6. Why does James warn believers to be cautious about teaching others in a local church?
7. If you are serving the church as a teacher how does this verse grip you? If you are not a teacher what is your reaction to this verse?

The word in Greek for *should become* (*ginomai*), can mean to assume or to set yourself up as a teacher. Heibert says, "The term "teachers," occurring only here in this epistle, is not to be

restricted to officially appointed teachers but includes all who arise to instruct their fellow members.” It was common in the early church for all the members to contribute something during their gathering (1 Corinthians 14:26-34). This practice was carried over from the style of synagogue services where nearly anyone aspiring to teach could get a hearing (Acts 13:5, 15). So, James is seeking to curb “the danger of talkativeness, of reckless statements, of frothy rhetoric, of abusive language, of misleading assertions” on the part of some aggressive members who were vocal in their opinions.²

8. How can you apply this to how you speak here at church?

b. The Tongue is C_____ – James 3:2-5a

9. What does James mean by “stumbling”?

10. What particular category of sinning is James concerned with here when he writes, “We all stumble”?

11. How do we all stumble?

12. When a person is walking, what effect does stumbling have on them?

¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, [James](#), Revised Edition (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 186.

² D. Edmond Hiebert, [James](#), Revised Edition (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 186.

13. There is some disagreement as to what exactly James meant in the next phrase.

And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man.

Option #1 – James is saying that only _____ people do not stumble in what they say. If this is James' intent what implications does this interpretation have?

Option #2 – James is using the word, *perfect* (teleios) to express _____. So, he is saying that if a man does not continue to stumble with his mouth or words, he is a mature man. What implications does this interpretation have?

14. What is the result of controlling the tongue? (see the last half of verse 2)

If you can control your _____, you can control your _____.

15. To prove his point, James gives us two illustrations. What are they?

16. How do these illustrations parallel the tongue and the body?

17. What is the danger of an uncontrolled tongue? Why is it so important to control the tongue?

You need to _____ your tongue because your _____ controls your body.

c. The Tongue is D_____ – James 3:5b-6

18. In the next illustration, what is being contrasted?

19. What metaphor does James give for the tongue?

20. Considering the previous illustration about a spark causing a great fire, what metaphor would you expect James to give for the tongue?

James goes on to give four more descriptions of the tongue in verse 5.

- The tongue is a world of _____.
- The tongue _____ the whole body.
- The tongue sets the _____ of daily life on fire.
- The tongue is _____ on fire by hell.

21. What are some thoughts about these five descriptions of the tongue? Which one do you find the most surprising?

d. The Tongue is U_____ – James 3:7-8

22. What contrast is James making in verses 7 and 8? Why is he making this contrast?

23. According to verse 8 why can't the tongue be tamed?

24. If it is true that no man can tame his own tongue, what hope do we have?

e. The Tongue is I_____ - James 3:9-12

25. What example does James give of a tongue that is inconsistent?

26. What is the irony in James' statement that we bless God and then curses people who are "made in the image of God"?

27. Notice that James begins verse 10 by writing "From the same *mouth* (not *tongue*) come blessing and cursing". Considering Matthew 12:34 (*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*). What is James implying about the source of the tongue's contradictory nature?

28. James condemns the inconsistency of the tongue among believers by giving 3 more illustrations. What are they and what point is he making?

III. Conclusion

James writes verses 1 through 12 in chapter 3 to warn believers of how dangerous their tongues can be when left uncontrolled. The tongue has the power to condemn, it is controlling, destructive, untamable, and it is inconsistent. James paints a very bleak picture of the tongue and the only hope we have of controlling it is through God's saving grace in our lives. And if we do, it's evidence that we are a Christian and evidence that we are walking in obedience.