**No One Can Tame the Tongue**

James 3:2-8

*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. …Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. … And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. …It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

Please note that the writings to Christians are filled with passages telling Christians to leave sinful living. Here are some for you to read: Romans 1:27-32; 1 Corinthians 6:7-11; Galatians 5:10-26; Ephesians 4:17-5:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Timothy 1:8-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:16-19; and 2 Timothy 3:1-9. If you list all these sins and then group them by type, you will see that one major group is sins with the tongue.

Here is a list of sins of the tongue taken from these scriptures:

1. Corrupt words, cursing, outbursts of wrath, malice
2. Deceit, lying, heresies, blasphemers
3. Whisperers, backbiters, reviling, evil speaking, slander
4. Bitterness, clamor
5. Contentions, dissentions, profane or idle babbling, quarreling
6. Foolish talking, course jesting, old wives’ tales
7. Boasting

Depending on how you define the words, you may rearrange the groups. That is not an issue. The things to see is that these actions with the tongue are listed as behaviors that don’t belong in the life of a Christian. Next, we will study each group in more detail to learn how to prevent ourselves from falling into a stony ground state that is unbecoming for Christians.

In group one, you can see a progression of how a person can move into worse use of the tongue. If we start off using corrupt language, it won’t be long before we start cursing. As our discontent grows, our anger will explode into a wrathful outburst followed by a heart of maliciousness that expresses itself openly. To be sure we understand, ***wrath*** is defined as *strong, stern, or fierce anger; deeply resentful indignation; ire.* ***Malice*** is the expression of *the desire to cause harm, injury, or distress to another through an unlawful or wrongful act without justification or excuse.* A Biblical example of this is found in the way Queen Jezebel tried to bring death to the prophet Elijah. The story is found in I Kings 19-21 and 2 Kings 9.

Group two contains all manner of speaking untruths. Deceit and lying are obvious to us as to their meaning. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that God hates. One of these is a *lying tongue*. Heresies and blasphemy include teaching false doctrines and telling lies against the Godhead. In John 10:33 Jesus is accused of blasphemy because He as man claimed to be God. His enemies had a hard time with Jesus’ claim, but He was not a blasphemer because He was speaking the truth. Jesus strongly cautioned us not to listen to false teaching (Matthew 24:11-24). Heresy can be so bold that heretics will even teach that we should deny Jesus (2 Peter 2:1). Basically any doctrine that denies the truth of the scripture or tries to twist what the scripture says is *heresy*.

In the next group we find uses of the tongue to destroy reputations and a person’s mental well-being. Words such as whisperers and backbiters describe people who won’t speak to your face but will go around behind your back and say terrible things about you. Paul the apostle had that happen to him. His defense of his apostleship is found in 2 Corinthians 11, 12. Even our Lord Jesus faced reviling. At His trial in the Jewish court, they sought false testimony against Him. They accused Him of being a blasphemer (Matthew 26:59,65). We should not be surprised if such happens to us. We should be certain that we are not doing it to others. It is sad that in today’s culture, a few words of slander can destroy a lifetime of excellent work, destroy a marriage, and destroy a person’s reputation. May we realize that when we let people talk to us in that way about others, we are guilty of promoting these evil vocal behaviors.

Have you ever heard someone speak loudly, even shouting to clerk or store manager or supervisor? They talk bitterly about how badly they have been treated and are using loud speech, i.e., clamor, to try and get their way. Do we ever shy away from that scene? When we do try to avoid it, that is an indication we know it is wrong. Do we turn around and become guilty of the very thing we found offensive? In Acts 28 is the story of a crowd of idolators that clamored for two hours to try to prevent Paul from preaching the gospel. It didn’t work.

Consider how destructive the next group of vocal sins are. Good rarely comes from contention, dissention, idle babbling, and quarreling. An example of how such behaviors were used to try and stop the proclamation of the gospel to gentiles. The story is in Acts 15. The issue was settled when everybody quit talking and listened to a message from God given by James, the Lord’s brother. “Idle babbling” occurs when the “office tattle tale” spreads a rumor or makes a false statement regarding something they “heard” or “saw.” If you have ever been the victim of such tales, you know the harm that can be caused as friends become enemies and work mates or family members have positive relationships destroyed.

Remember this old wives‘ tale? Swallow a piece of gum and it will remain in your stomach for seven years. How about this one: knocking on wood will bring you good luck, but breaking a mirror will bring you bad luck. None of these are true, but they illustrate how such tales can influence us. Some myths that Paul mentions were “Christians are not supposed to marry,” or “Christians can’t eat certain meats.” The one about meats is still being taught today and it is an attempt to force the old covenant rules onto Christians.

Boasting is an attempt to self-elevate one’s standing in the community. “I am the best at …” will bring forth a challenge and embarrassment. One example Jesus gives is of a farmer who boasted he had done so well he would never have to work again. It turned out the “no working” part was true as the farmer died the very night of the day he made the boast (Luke 12)

*Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles* (Prov 21:23). May we be diligent in keeping sin from our mouth.