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Fiberglass 5 Step**

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CONTROLLING THE FIRE

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CONTROLLING THE FIRE

“Think before you speak” is an axiom that has been handed down for generations, and it is well that it has been because this principle has a firm base in scripture. Exhortations to control the tongue, as well as to exercise self-control in all areas of life, abound in both the Old and New Testaments.

James is the New Testament writer who has much to say about controlling the tongue. His most aggressive statement has to be in James 1:26 where he says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (NKJ). It is one thing to say that a person may be weak in the faith, but to say that his religion is useless takes the situation to an entirely new level.

James picks up this idea in chapter three where he says, once again aggressively, that the tongue has the power to kindle an entire forest, that it is a fire that can defile the whole body and set nature on fire, and that it is set on fire by hell itself. And then in verse eight, he says it is so powerful that no one can tame it: "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

Reading such words leaves us almost breathless and at least perplexed about how we are to deal with our own tongue. Since we realize God never gives a command that it is impossible to fulfill, we know James does not mean we are immediately doomed to defeat. He means that, while we may tame wild animals and have confidence they are under control, that never happens with the tongue. We may control our tongue for many years; yet during a moment of weakness, if we let our guard down, we may say things that will cause untold, sometimes even irrevocable, damage. So his point is that we can never feel confident that our tongue is completely conquered-that we can say we will never have to worry about that problem again. So with our tongue we must ever be on guard.

The lesson is clear. We must think carefully about the impact of our words before we let them fly from our lips. What we say to others can come across to them in ways we never intended. Words can cause hurt, they can cause division, they can cause confusion. But we must weigh our words so that none of these is a problem.

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The most common sin of the tongue is reacting angrily to another person because of something he says or does to us or perhaps just "flying off the handle," as we say- that is, reacting angrily and immediately to a situation without thinking.

Other sins of the tongue can include criticizing others without just cause, complaining excessively about situations in life or in the church, telling lies, gossiping, tale bearing, causing disunity among brethren, and the list goes on. James' teaching strongly admonishes us to avoid these sins-that is, "Think before you speak."

Joe Norton

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