

## **A Tongue Just Long Enough to Slit One's Throat**

The third chapter of James has a great deal to say about the human tongue. It's not the physical tongue itself that is the focus of discussion. Rather, the word "tongue" is used figuratively to represent our speech. In particular, James is dealing with the way we speak about others. Read carefully these inspired words:

"But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeding blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." (James 3:8-12).

Keeping the tongue from making unkind and unnecessary comments is a major task. In the verses prior to the reading above, James wrote that the tongue is a fire (verse 6) and that while man has been able to bring beasts, birds and other creatures into subjection (verse 7), he has not been able to tame his tongue. Consequently, the untamed tongue goes unchecked in its loose talk and bitter destruction of others through gossip and rumors and catty comments. The untamed tongue lashes out like an uncontrolled, two-edged blade, cutting people apart and eventually slitting one's own throat with words that one day come back to haunt him or her.

Even Christians are not above the temptation to slice away with their tongues from time to time. "Did you hear about..." and "I shouldn't say this, but..." and "I'm not supposed to tell this to anyone but..." are phrases that unfortunately often begin sentences out of Christian's mouths. Paul had to deal with this when he wrote to the Galatians, "For all the law is fulfilled in this one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." (Galatians 5:14-15).

We expect such loose talk from worldly lips, but Christians should be above this careless and unrighteous use of the tongue. We have so many wonderful ways in which we can use our words that it seems we should barely have time to employ them as weapons against our fellow man and, yes, even our fellow Christians. We can teach God's Word (Mark 16:15), speak words of comfort (I Thessalonians 4:18), exhort others to obedience (II Timothy 4:2), and carry encouraging words to those who need lifting up (I Thessalonians 3:5-7). As we think of this, let's remember James' comment that the tongue is a fire. Let's also remember that fire can be a good thing. It can warm. It can cook. It can provide light. Fire doesn't have to be destructive. It can be beneficial. So also that little fire between our teeth doesn't have to be destructive. It can be used for so many wonderful purposes.

Satan has a bagful of useful tools for destroying a congregation of the Lord's church. None is more effective for him than the tool of loose talk among Christians. Such talk leads to "confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). When Christians have enough time to stand around and criticize, gossip, complain and spread rumors, it usually means that they aren't very busy in the Lord's work. The more we involve ourselves in service to God, the less time we have for such unholy use of the tongue. Dear Christian, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt..." (Galatians 4:6).

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