

The Power of the Tongue

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

The tongue. Everybody has one, but we do not always use it wisely. Therefore, we need to address this subject in the context of the whole counsel of God so that people might be encouraged in the Word of God and prevented from committing any sin that might ruin the ministry of Christ when God is moving in a revival.

God wants to stir up the gift that is within us. With that, He desires to refresh us in some practical truths that will help us to be careful and to help us to go to Calvary's Cross.

The indwelling Christ can give us victory over this very small yet powerful member of our bodies. My prayer is that as we consider this subject, we might be very sensitive and very concerned about how our own lives can affect the lives of others. Each one of us needs to ask God, "Is my tongue under control? Have I been a stumbling block or an offense to someone who may not know You—or maybe they know You

and are just very weak? Have I been a stumbling block to my children or to a young believer or to anyone else?"

As you read this booklet, carefully consider what the Bible has to say about the tongue. Remember that its power is great, not only in its ability to tear down and to wound but also in its capacity to build up and to heal.

Chapter One

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITHFUL TEACHERS

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in words, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

“Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

“Behold also the ships which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it de-

fileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

“For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

“Therefore bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

“Out of the same mouth proceedeth 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.

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

“This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

“But 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.

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:1-18).

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof ” (Proverbs 18:21).

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and every Christian needs to realize that within his body is a member that can produce either life or death in somebody else.

The Word of God says, “Be not many [teachers]” (James 3:1). God is not trying to discourage people from seeking and training for the office of teaching. There is, however, greater condemnation on those that teach the Word of God, because they are accountable to teach the way of life, which results in eternal life or in eternal death with eternal torment in hell.

If He has given you a gift, we certainly encourage you to pray about it and let the Lord Jesus Christ develop that gift in you for His glory.

But He is inferring that those who desire the office of a teacher or the office of a pastor, or who just desire to go out and be used of God in the highways and byways, need to be extremely cautious, recognizing that there is a greater condemnation that goes with that ministry. Of course, there is also a greater reward, a greater satisfaction, and a greater joy that accompanies that calling, if we remain faithful as stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Effective Communication

“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27).

This tells me one thing, that whether it is I or some other pastor, we need to be very careful to declare the whole counsel of God. If we as teachers don’t do this effectively through God’s mind and heart, then great is the condemnation upon us. So we must be careful that we do not offend anybody.

When I say “do not offend,” I mean that we are to be sensitive to people without tearing down God’s standards and minimizing the importance of God’s standards before the people.

We don't want them to think that there is an easy road or easy way in this Christian life. We teach the *whole* counsel of God. But we must draw the picture of God's truth in simplicity and emphatically, with a vivid explanation from the Word of God, just as the Lord Jesus describes it in the Bible. We must not teach a sentimental love story as many people do today.

Oh, there is hardly a service where we do not speak of divine love—unconditional love that forgives and forgets as it looks beyond a man's faults and sees his need. We believe in that love with all our heart. Furthermore, we believe that every Christian should have the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5, Titus 3:6).

This love of Christ is a love that does not demand love in return. It is a love that is not based on how the person loves me back. It is a love that is not measured by how people use me or respond to me. It is a love that is an unlimited, inexhaustible, wonderful attribute—God's gift to me through the Holy Spirit. He sheds it abroad in my heart so I can give it to other people.

We must realize that this love is so important; however, we must not be guilty of teaching

a sentimental, lukewarm, easygoing, weak, anemic, spiritually contradictory type of love such as that which is going forth from many pulpits today.

That is why we must study the Word of God and study what is going on in the world of religion. We must realize that there will be a great condemnation for false teachers, who draw many aside and entice them with their own words and ideas of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we cannot divorce our thoughts from the Word of God.

Thus, the Lord Jesus has plainly said, "Do not desire to be a teacher unless you want to go by the entire Word of God. And be careful of offending anybody."

I must be careful that I do not offend anybody. And that does not mean by a strong message, because a strong message always offends the flesh. The Lord Jesus Christ had a ministry that was offensive in that respect. But we must speak the truth in love and let our speech be seasoned with salt.

Present the Truth Clearly

Every pastor and teacher must be very careful not to offend the person who is listening by

giving them a perverted view of the Word of God. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:

“And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (verses 5-6).

In other words, He said, “It is better for you if you never were born than to offend a child or a young Christian, whoever he may be, with the wrong doctrine, wrong teachings, or wrong ideas.”

That is why, when we teach the Scripture, we must speak out boldly, without compromise, and without apologizing that we do not go along with hundreds of churches that do not preach the whole counsel of God. Still, we speak the truth lovingly.

I have shed many tears as I have contemplated this subject. A pastor has a tremendous responsibility under God, and he must teach the whole counsel. Many people do not understand the tremendous responsibility of a faithful preacher of the Gospel. Naturally, we know we will be misunderstood. We know that many people will not receive what we teach, and

many will not obey. But our prayer is that some will—and some do—and that they will go out and teach others who will, perhaps, do the same. The entire prayer of the pastor-teacher's heart is that he would be faithful to the Lord Jesus and not given to offending people by refusing to preach the whole counsel of God.

It all starts with the tongue, a subject that is in everybody's mouth. Oh, how the tongue can bring blessings, or harm, to many lives. There is such power in the tongue.

Chapter Two

WORDS IN SEASON
ARE WORDS OF LIFE

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in words, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

“Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body” (James 3:2-3).

In his letter to the persecuted Church, James has provided several illustrations regarding the tongue. He has presented a principle and laid a foundation, and now he will give illustrations to teach us what this means.

James describes our need to bridle our tongues, even as we put a bit in the horses’ mouths. With the bit, the rider is able to steer the horse in the direction he wants the animal to go. He describes a picture of a young horse that is feeling good, full of life and energy. This horse wants to go somewhere.

I remember when we had a young colt, back on the farm. Before he was broken, trained, and disciplined, that colt always wanted to go somewhere. He never knew where, though. (And when we were riding him, we never knew where!) We had to get a bit in his mouth and begin to direct him in the direction that we wanted him to go.

This is the way it is with our tongue, and God says we ought to have a bit. We can easily offend someone by not having control of this all-important member of our body.

Losing Track of Our Words

Think about this little poem:

*I lost a little word just the other day.
It was a very naughty word
I hadn't meant to say.
I really didn't lose it,
because from my lips it flew.
My little brother picked it up,
and now he's saying it too.*

You know, that is the way it happens. We say a little word, and it is only a tiny, naughty word. Spiritually speaking, however, this tiny word hurts a brother or a sister in Christ and stirs up a

misunderstanding. It was just a little word. We didn't mean to say it. It just came out so fast. But we did not "lose" it at all, because someone else picked it up. Then another one picked it up, and he started saying it, too. Then, you have many people saying it. Before you know it, you have a satanic conspiracy in God's church.

We have to be so careful, because death *and* life are in the power of the tongue, according to Proverbs 18:21.

One of the greatest opportunities we have as born-again believers is to let the life of the Lord Jesus Christ live in us and, thereby, to have a tongue that is under control. It is so crucial to let the Lord Jesus Christ control our tongues. If you can concentrate, the Spirit of God will write something about this on your heart.

Words that Change Lives

I remember a woman in her late twenties who had cancer. She battled for two years, and in the process of dying, while she lay in the hospital bed, she used her tongue to be a blessing to many people. The words of her testimony are still in the mouths of some people because of this young lady. She always had something good to say. She loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and

she wrote many poems in her Bible that were used at her funeral service.

She brought a tremendous blessing to people. At least one person went forward to receive Jesus Christ after she died, and it was because of the testimony of her life when she was in that hospital bed. The words that revealed her life's response to this adverse circumstance touched someone, and her tongue became an instrument to bring a tremendous blessing.

I have always thought how wonderful it is when the tongue can be a blessing like that—to bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ even after we die, and then to bring them out of death into eternal life and the revelation of salvation through the Lord Jesus. That is exactly what this woman's tongue was able to do with a very consistent, steadfast testimony. By the grace of God, day after day and night after night, her tongue became a tremendous blessing to the doctors and nurses, relatives, and friends.

Oh, how the tongue can be a blessing! It can be a tremendous blessing to everybody, all the time, when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ and let Him live through us.

Words for the Weary

“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary” (Isaiah 50:4a). That is what the Lord Jesus Christ received from God the Father. He wants to impart that same wisdom to us—wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. He wants to give us the tongue that knows how to speak, who to speak to, and when to speak.

It doesn’t take much to say something that will really encourage somebody along this terrible, weary journey of life. I want my tongue to come into captivity, to be a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the desire of my heart.

As we grow in grace and band together, co-laboring in the Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry here, I pray continually that we would not be conceited, that we would not highly esteem ourselves, and that we would not think that we have attained or that we know it all. I pray that we would get serious with God and let the Holy Spirit of God train us and teach us to be people of God. Let the Holy Spirit be like a bit in our mouth to control our tongue and really begin to direct our heart.

I remember meeting with a man who was an alcoholic, and all that I said was this: “You know, the Lord Jesus Christ really loves you, and He will give you power over that. It breaks His heart to see you doing this to yourself.”

This person has shared his testimony several times, and he said that the one thing that got through to him was when he heard that the Lord Jesus Christ loved him. It wasn’t very much, but it was enough to set him free and deliver him from alcoholism.

A word in season—using the tongue to bring a blessing: When you see somebody down, never tread on him. By God’s grace, take his hand and pull him up and let the Lord Jesus Christ produce His life through you so that your tongue can be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Three

WORDS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In this life, there are many dangers in having a tongue that is quick to be sarcastic. God understands our makeup, and God will give us victory. But we must recognize how dangerous it is. Remember: Within the power of the tongue is death and life. Somebody might listen to words from the sarcastic tongue of a Christian, and it might drive them away from Christianity.

Let us speak with all the love of God radiating through us. May our tongues bring a message of deliverance, speaking words that will really be a blessing to the hearer—the person who is so weary and tired, so disappointed, so frustrated, and so emotionally disturbed.

We must watch the tongue that is hasty to speak. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Silence sometimes

is golden. Sometimes it is better not to speak at all. Sometimes it is better just to listen.

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit” (Proverbs 17:27).

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, a man can have understanding and, with that, an excellent spirit. It is a beautiful thing to be able to spare our words and just speak a word in season. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:2, we are to be instant in season and out of season, proclaiming the truth.

God wants us to know that the only way our tongues can be continually under control is to live in the reality of Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

He wants to give every one of us a golden tongue; He wants us to come to Calvary’s Cross. It is not enough that I did this yesterday and today. The Lord Jesus wants me to do it tomorrow, for the rest of this week, and every day until He comes back. He wants me to live in this practice one day at a time, even one moment at a time.

Let Your Words be Well Chosen

I remember hearing a story about John Wesley holding public meetings where many people were getting saved—so many that a few townspeople took him and a group of the Methodists to court. The judge said to the townspeople, “What is your charge? Why did you want these Methodists to come to court?”

One fellow got up and he said, “Well, my wife used to talk and complain all the time, and now she hardly speaks at all,” he said, “and I don’t like it.”

The judge said, “Sir, I dismiss this case. I want to say to Mr. Wesley, I hope he can win a lot more people to the Lord Jesus Christ if this is the result.”

Well, may I say that this could be true with the men as well. But in any case, it is a fact in life that when we have the tongue of the learned, the Holy Spirit being the bit to guide our tongue, then we know when to speak, and we know when not to speak, and we know when to spare our words.

Someone once told me that he was just going through the motions, attending church, but spiritually he was not getting along too well. He

was not progressing. Then, out of the blue, someone asked him, "Would you teach Sunday School?"

He said, "No, I can't. I will be honest with you. I don't have any interest in young people."

"All right," the other man answered. "I'll tell you what. Would you just pray that God will give you a love for the young people?"

That is all he said.

The fellow went home and he thought it over and said, "I will pray that God will give me a love for the young people."

He prayed that night, and the next morning he got up and he prayed again, and tears came to his eyes. God gave him a tremendous vision in his heart of a world for young people. "I will teach them, Lord. I'll do the best I can. I will come to You and let You teach me, and I will teach them."

Soon he was teaching and getting along fine. He went back and said to that other fellow two months later, "That was a wonderful thing that you said to me."

And the fellow said, "What did I say?"

"You said, 'Would you go home and pray about teaching young people?' That is all you said, and that is what did it. God has changed

my life. I have a vision for the young people, and God is doing wonders in the Sunday School class."

A Small Member Steers the Ship

"Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor (the helm) listeth" (James 3:4).

The troubled sea, the tempest, the wind and waves, and here is your ship going down in the water, going down in the vast ocean. All of a sudden, just this small helm was able to turn it.

The Lord Jesus Christ is giving us a picture here that we are going through a life that is tempestuous. We are in a body of sin. It is a body that is heading for the grave. It is a life that cannot be controlled by Adam. It is a life that cannot come under the dominion of God until the Spirit of Christ comes into our heart to live. The ship is rocking and the storm is coming. The waves are pounding up against the boat, the wind is blowing, and it's a fierce storm.

All it takes to change the course of a storm is the Spirit of Christ (Mark 4:39). Using my tongue, I ask Jesus to come into my heart and live. This

choice changed how I feel. It changed my relationship to my fellow men. Now I speak the right things, and everything is so much better. God is honored. Things are going much more smoothly for me. I feel better, act better, think better, and talk better. I am more willing to help others because the Spirit of Christ, the living Christ, is taking over my tongue in this tempestuous terrible storm of this old life.

Jesus Christ wants us to be cautious as we recognize the power of the tongue and let the Spirit of Christ take over. He wants us to proclaim the whole counsel of God, to cry aloud and spare not (Isaiah 58:1). He wants us to serve one another in a loving, kind, gracious, tactful way so that we might be edified as we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18).

CONCLUSION

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. A foul tongue will never honor heaven. A lying tongue will never honor heaven. A hasty tongue will always destroy and hurt many. A sarcastic tongue is dangerous, and we need victory over that. We must confess wrong attitudes and repent from a tongue that is foul, lying, hasty, or sarcastic, and let God give us victory.

We need to have a tongue that always speaks words of wisdom, a tongue that always speaks the truth, a tongue that always brings out what should be said from God's mind, and always at the right time, instant in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). Let's do it through the love of God, for the love of God and for the welfare of mankind. The soul that is lost needs to know Christ. The soul that is weak needs to hear that encouraging word.

Father, we thank You that You always speak to us with right words at the right time. And Lord Jesus,

we pray that You would help every single one of us to present our bodies a living sacrifice that we might be sanctified wholly, spirit, soul, and body. We are all frail, weak men of the earth. But we pray that You will let the very peace of God and the power of Christ control and have dominion over us.

Dear Lord, take our tongues, these little members in our mouths, and make us a great blessing to one another. We pray that Christ will be glorified in our communication. Let us grow in Your grace because of it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.