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THE TONGUE

JAMES 3

Our tongue is an intriguing study of great contrasts. Think of that object resting in your mouth just now.

To the Doctor it is a two ounce slab of mucous membrane containing a world of inter-related muscles and nerves. That is the interesting tongue.

To our Body it is a vital organ that must work properly if we are to eat, chew, taste, swallow and talk. That is the helpful tongue.

To other People the tongue is the primary avenue of communication. It gives us the ability to inflect sounds and articulate words distinctly. It gives us a vehicle to communicate our thoughts. That is the essential tongue.

Yes, without the tongue –
 No teacher could guide their pupils.
 No coach could prepare his team.
 No mother could softly sing her baby to sleep.
 No leader could motivate his group adequately.
 No Pastor could bring comfort to heavy hearts.
 No issues could be discussed and resolved.

In fact, without the communication of conversation our whole planet would be reduced to a mere roar of unintelligible grunting and groaning. It is rare that we stop to reflect on how vital this little muscle in our mouth really is.

But the tongue is not merely vital, it is also volatile. It was Washington Irving who first stated “The tongue is the only

cutting tool that grows sharper by constant use.” He actually was only mirroring the words of the first New Testament letter. James the brother of Jesus says James 3:6-8 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. 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. NKJV

Without proper care and use the tongue can become a lifelong scourge. A flame throwing tool of destruction that blackens the foliage along the path of life. One writer¹ noticed a grave stone with an interesting epitaph and reflects upon it. Listen to his thoughts:

On a windswept hill in an English countryside church yard stands a drab, gray slate tombstone. Bleak and unpretentious, it leans slightly to one side, beaten slick and thin by the blast of time. The quaint stone bears an epitaph not easily seen unless you stoop over and look closely. The faint etchings read:

BENEATH THIS STONE, A LUMP OF CLAY,
 LIES ARABELLA YOUNG,
 WHO, ON THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY,
 BEGAN TO HOLD HER TONGUE.

What an awful way to be remembered. And even more, what an incredibly wasted life. Why would such an awful commentary need to be etched in stone for Arabella Young? Because she never dealt with the powerful member of her body that resides in the mouth!

With the deadliness of cyanide, a verbal assault kills. With the destruction of fire verbal missiles find their marks and destroy.

¹ Swindoll, Seasons of Life, p. .

But this hellish beast as James describes our tongues looks so innocent as it rests peacefully behind the ivory gates of our teeth. There are so many incredible ways we can use our tongue. It is about the most agile of all our organs in the body. When eating popcorn it can deftly find and flick a husk out of an irritating position or roll around a thermometer to hold it just in the right place. Your tongue can roll that peppermint candy around your mouth to savor each drop or at a band leader's direction dart in and out of the mouthpiece of a trumpet and never miss a note of the "Flight of the Bumblebee".

James tells us that our tongues are humanly untameable. They are beyond the power of man to control. Only God through His personal presence as the indwelling Holy Spirit can control your tongue and mine. As James states we can watch the wonder of animals who are trained: Lassie, Shamu and Flipper. There are tigers who learn to jump through rings of fire at the circus, killer whales that perform at Sea World, Falcons that land on our hands and hunt for us, dogs who fetch the morning paper, pigeons who carry messages, bears that ride bicycles, elephants that stand on balls and horses that come at the whistle of their trainers . . .

But not so with that tongue of ours. Many have commented on the need of tongue taming.

➤ William Norris an American journalist once wrote:

If your lips would keep from slips, Five things observe with care:
To whom you speak; of whom you speak;
And how, and when, and where.

- Publius a Greek philosopher wrote: I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.
- David, the man after God's own heart made a life long commitment in Psalm 39. Let's turn there and consider the

necessity of following his example:

Psalm 39:1 I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me." NKJV

David shows us the only way to control our tongues is to give them in consecration to the Lord. How can we start this habit? Turn on to Psalm 141:3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. NKJV

There it is, a prayer of dedication, a plea for the Lord to take and use our tongue for His glory.

Jesus explains how important our words are. Look at Matthew 12:34 "Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** NKJV

The window on the soul is the mouth. All that lies within is reflected by our words. What can our words show? These are the byproducts of an unregenerated heart:

1. CURSES: Psalm 10:7 His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness. NASB
2. HATRED: Psalm 109:3 They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, And fought against me without a cause. NKJV
3. LUST Proverbs 5:3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, And smoother than oil is her speech; NASB
4. PERVERSITY Proverbs 6:12 A worthless person, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth; NKJV
5. Proverbs 11:11 By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. NKJV
6. LIES Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight. NKJV

7. PRIDE: Proverbs 14:3 In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them. NKJV
8. FOOLISHNESS: Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth Foolishness. NKJV
9. EVIL Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. NASB
10. FLATTERY: Proverbs 26:28 A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, And a flattering mouth works ruin. NKJV
11. DECEIT Jeremiah 9:8 Their tongue is an arrow shot out; It speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, But in his heart he lies in wait. NKJV
12. IDLE WORDS: Matthew 12:36 "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. NKJV
13. GOSSIP: Romans 1:28-30 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; **they are whisperers**, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, NKJV
14. CORRUPT (ROTTEN or CUTTING) WORDS: Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. NKJV
- 15.
16. FALSE DOCTRINE: Titus 1:10-11 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. NKJV

So what should we avoid? Never use our mouth in an unregenerated way!

What should we do? Tame our tongue by the Holy Spirit as His Word richly dwells and permeates all our lives. Why not like David, make some plans now to change our usage of our tongues?

Here are three great ways to change:

THINK FIRST: before starting to say something pause a few seconds and ask are these words – true or false? exaggerated or accurate? pure or dirty? healing or cutting? grateful or complaining?

TALK LESS: it is a biblical fact that the less you talk the wiser you appear. Plan, prepare, concentrate and enrich each opportunity to speak. Make each a time to speak as 1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. NKJV

START NOW: like David, ask God to fit you for a word retainer, get braces put on that tongue. Remember Arabella Young? She waited so long it never happened. Don't waste your greatest tool.