

SKY

Correspondence Course

Lesson 8

Watch What You Say

Lesson Text:

James 3:1–10; 13–18

In the previous lesson, James discussed a living faith. If you do not do good works, your faith is dead. Now James turns to another important topic, the tongue. A Christian should continually strive to avoid some of the pitfalls of close human associations. Judging one another (Romans 14:13), making spiritual comparisons (2 Corinthians 10:12), offending those who are weak, gossiping and spreading rumors (James 3)—none of these have any place in true Christianity. On the contrary, as a Christian, you must do your best to “never put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13), to compare yourselves only with “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), to strengthen those who are weak, and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).

James’ discussion about the tongue was primarily for those who held the office of “teacher.” During this time in history, teachers were respected and honored. Because of the high esteem they received, holding the office of “teacher” was desired. Then as now, there are those who hold offices that are not qualified. The office may be attained for selfish reasons only. Today, teachers are not regarded with the same amount of admiration as they were at this time; however, the ability to control your tongue is just as important for each of us as it is for the teacher.

A Christian Controls His Tongue— Teaching Responsibly

Read James 3:1—In this verse, James is speaking to those teachers called “Rabbi.” James was warning these teachers that what they teach and how they teach it will be strictly judged. To shape and mold young, impres-

sionable minds was a huge responsibility. If they did not do it correctly, they would receive condemnation. Condemnation means judging someone who is guilty of wrongdoing and then pronouncing a punishment. Jesus said, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Bridle Your Tongue

Read James 3:2—James is referring to all of us when he says “we all stumble.” Through the course of your life, you will err, stumble, and fall. You may aggravate or annoy those around you when this happens. When a teacher gives out misinformation, or an error in teaching, it is far more serious because that error is multiplied by how many heard the error. James says of the person that uses words that will not harm or make others stumble, “He is a perfect man.” Here, “perfect” means being in control. It does not mean sinless. As we all know, it is hard to control the tongue. Words can fly out of your mouth that you will regret later and those words cannot be put back. The harm has been done. Therefore, if you can control your tongue, you are also someone who can control your whole body.

Read James 3:3-5—James makes three comparisons here to illustrate the power of the tongue. The first comparison is a small bit. Even a small bit in the mouth of a large horse can control the horse. Next, a rudder in a large ship is small in comparison, but is capable of controlling the ship. Finally, a small kindling fire can destroy an entire forest. So, just as a bit, rudder, or spark of fire can make a situation serious, the tongue which is very small has the same power.

Dangers of an Out-of-Control Tongue

Read James 3:6—What does James mean when he says “the tongue is a fire”? A fire can destroy, wreck lives, and create chaos. Could it be that he is saying the tongue can do the same? If someone says something to you in a hurtful way, does it arouse anger or sadness in you? Chances are it does. The tongue is considered the most worldly of all our body parts. The tongue can defile (which means to make something filthy) the whole body. The tongue, as you go through your life, can start fires—unnecessary fires. It seems that James is saying the source of the fire that inflames the tongue is hell itself.

Read James 3:7—Have you ever been to a circus, zoo, or aquarium? Better yet, have you visited places where they train wild animals to do tricks? If man has the power over nature to train such wild beasts, why can't man control or have power over his tongue?

Read James 3:8—Does this mean we give up and not try to keep our tongue in control? No. James is just letting us know that the tongue is never really subdued. We must always be aware and on guard of our tongue. Do not allow your tongue to burst out of control. James compares our tongue to a deadly poison. Our tongue is worse than deadly poison.

A Tongue Divided

Read James 3:9-10—One minute our tongue will bless, praise, and worship God, and the next it will curse men who are made in the image of God. Because man is made in the image of God, man is set apart from the animal kingdom. Why would we praise God, and then curse the man who is created in God's image? It is obvious that James is appalled by such actions.

True Wisdom— Avoid False Wisdom

Read James 3:13—Just because you know God's truth doesn't mean you know how to use it. Having wisdom means you apply the knowledge and the truth to the best of your ability. Having all the facts and all the answers is no assurance that they will be used wisely.

Read James 3:14—There is no room for an envious or self-seeking attitude. It is wrong to put others down to elevate yourself. If you have such an attitude in your heart, do not glory in it, as you are just lying against the truth. The truth you are lying against is the knowledge and understanding of God's way that you hold so dear in your heart. Sometimes we gossip about others

because it makes us feel superior. When you hear the shortcomings of others, it may make you feel more Christian or moral.

Read James 3:15, 16—If you have envy and strife in your heart, then it is clear that your wisdom does not come from God, but from Satan. Satan wants confusion to set in as it creates situations where evil may grow.

Godly Wisdom

Read James 3:17—James now describes what is wisdom from above: “Pure” because it is from God. “Peaceable” because there is no personal ambition that will bring strife or hurt to others. “Gentle,” because a gentle person will go above and beyond what is required of him. “Willing to yield” describes a Christian who listens to others and then makes a decision. “Full of mercy and good works” describes an individual that seeks and shows concern for the needs others. Wisdom done “without partiality” is wisdom that is not a respecter of persons, but is concerned about all people. Finally, “without hypocrisy” is wisdom without a mask. The Christian face you wear to church is the same face you should wear no matter where you go.

Read James 3:18—Peace is the seed and righteousness is the harvest. How do we achieve godly righteousness? We speak with care, avoiding gossip that only hurts feelings and destroys reputations, and we fill our minds with purity. There is a poem we should consider whenever someone has some juicy gossip to share with us. It is entitled “Three Gates of Gold” by Beth Day —“Is it true? Is it needful? Is it kind?”

A verse worthy to remember:

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit”
(Proverbs 18:21)

Word Definitions

These definitions were taken from
Webster's New World Dictionary

- **Bridle**—Anything that controls or constrains, to curb and to control.
- **Iniquity**—A wicked or unjust act.
- **Defiles**—Make filthy
- **Hypocrisy**—A pretending to be what one is not.

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Questions and Answers

1. James' discussion about the tongue was mainly directed toward:
A. Teachers
B. Students
C. Presidents
2. In James 3:2, "he is a perfect man" means to be...
A. Without sin
B. In control
C. A perfectionist
3. True/False—Those who can control their tongue can control their body. ____
4. James compared the tongue to three items. What were they?

5. Why did James use these three comparisons?

6. True/False—The tongue can cause the same degree of damage a fire can. ____
7. True/False—No man can tame the tongue, so we should just give up trying. ____
8. True/False—I know the truth of God; therefore I automatically know how to use it. ____
9. Why will the words of teachers be judged more harshly than the words of others?

10. What part of the body is the most difficult to control?

- A. The mind
- B. The heart
- C. The tongue

11. What should you do the next time someone wants to spread a rumor or gossip about another person?

12. Have you ever used your tongue in an unwise way? What made you do this?

13. Why do we like to gossip?

14. Describe earthly wisdom

15. Describe godly wisdom.

16. The words we choose to use are our responsibility. Now that you know what the Bible has to say about the harm the tongue can cause, how will you show kindness and love as you go through life?

Answers

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1. A
2. B
3. T
4.
 1. A bit in a horse's mouth
 2. A rudder that steers a ship
 3. A small kindling fire
5. He used them because they are all things that everyone knows about. They are small examples which control large things.
6. T
7. F
8. F
9. They will be judged more harshly because shaping and molding young minds is a big responsibility. Teachers are suppose to be trusted to pass on correct information.
10. C
11. Tell them that you don't want to hear it. Also say that they shouldn't be spreading rumors.
12. Yes, because I was mad.
13. To make ourselves feel superior. It's a way of getting attention.
14. Earthly wisdom is having jealousy and selfishness, bringing about confusion and taking good and turning it into evil.
15. Godly wisdom is being pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good works, and without partiality and hypocrisy.
16. I will pray and ask for God's wisdom. I will do my best not to spread rumors or gossip.