

The Tongue- A World Of Iniquity

by Casey Head

The tongue is the cause of so many conflicts and problems among Christians. The wrong this is said, or the right thing is said in the wrong way. We often use our speech to hurt and malign our brothers and sisters in Christ, not thinking about their feelings and needs. And then there is the temptation that many have to use fowl language, to curse God, and to say things that are wicked and worldly. If more Christians were concerned about their speech and language, then perhaps there would not be so many problems in the church today.

We are told in James 3:5-6, “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 defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” Clearly, the tongue is a very present danger for the people of God. Even though it is such a small part of our physical body, we can use it to destroy ourselves, other people, and even to blaspheme the Almighty God. Just a few words can start a whole heap of trouble in the church. And then notice verse eight, “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” Is James saying that despite our diligent efforts, our tongue will always be uncontrollable and wicked? No. The point is simply that our speech and language will always be something that we have to guard. Never will there come a point where we as Christians do not have to worry about our tongue. It can be controlled, but it cannot be subdued completely.

Not only does James tell us that the tongue is a “world of iniquity,” but notice also his point in verse ten, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” In other words, it is wrong for those who profess to be Christians to also be using their tongue for evil and sinful purposes. This brings up an important question- how should Christians use their tongue?

One passage alone, I believe, can sufficiently answer this question. In Ephesians 4:29, Paul says, “Let NO corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” Rather than using our tongue to hurt and offend others, we should use it to encourage and build others up. As seen in verses 31-32, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Do you see the point? Our speech is a reflection of our attitude and spirit. If a person can learn to develop the right attitude, then their speech will improve tenfold. That makes sense, doesn’t it? When a person is bitter and angry, then their words will often be cruel and hateful. On the other hand, if a person is kind and tender-hearted, then their speech will echo love and compassion. In order to solve the tongue problem, first solve the attitude problem.

Christians need to learn to think before they speak; to consider the feelings of others before they say something that they will later regret. God tells us in Proverbs 29:20, “Seeth thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” If we are wise, then we will think before we speak, and as a result, there will be less problems and conflicts. In James 1:19, we are also told to be slow to speak. Sometimes, it is better to listen, and to make our words few. The words we do speak should be motivated by love.

All this said, we will still have problems with our speech and language. It may be that despite our efforts, we still manage to say the wrong thing, or the right thing the wrong way. Or it could be that we allow our emotions to get the best of us and we say something that hurts and offends other people. When we do fall short in this area, we need to be humble enough to apologize. Always be willing to approach fellow Christians in a spirit of meekness when your words are hurtful, even if it was done intentionally or unintentionally. If we follow these basic principles, it will be that much easier to establish and maintain peace in the local church.