

Sermon or Lesson: James 3:3-5a (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Your Tongue Steers The Direction Of Your Life

INTRO: When you were growing up, did your mother ever repeatedly give you the instruction, "If you don't have something nice to say, then don't say anything at all"? Do you ever stop to consider what impact your words have, not just upon other people but also upon your own life?

Let's look at some examples in James about the personal impact that your words have.

READ: James 3:3-5a, with v.2 for context

Verses 3 and 4 each contain follow-up physical illustrations of the principle in verse 2, that anyone who is able to keep his/her speech in check is likewise able to keep the other areas of his/her life in check as well.

v.3 - READ

[Lesson Question: For the examples in verses 3 and 4, identify their meaning and correlate with the main point of these verses 3-5a?]

SECTION POINT: Though small, the tongue has the ability to set the direction of one's whole life.

- - In the first illustration, controlling the bit in the horse's mouth gives the rider sufficient ability or means to persuade, influence, and lead the rest of the horse, it's body and direction.

v.4 - READ

SECTION POINT: Moreover, the tongue possesses great power and potential to influence or set the direction of one's whole life.

- - In considering the largeness of the ship and the strength of the winds that drive the ship, something so small as the rudder can steer the ship wherever the person steering the rudder chooses. The one who controls the small rudder, controls the direction of the whole large ship being pushed by strong winds.

- - The emphasis in both examples is on a small-sized part being able to effectively influence the direction of its very large whole.

v.5a - READ

SECTION POINT: Furthermore, the tongue, though small, is even used to make great boasts about its successes in wielding its power to set the direction or influence the course of events for the large whole.

-- "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body", but even though it is small, it has the ability to exert and wield great influence through its speaking of boastful words. The tongue's magnitude of influence is disproportional to its physical size.

-- By implication, the tongue, though small, exerts considerable influence / steering / control over the larger whole of one's life, which follows it.

IMPLICATIONS:

[Lesson Question: Identify and explain the underlying source of the problem from which the tongue operates.]

SECTION POINT: The core source of the problem with the tongue is the thinking that resides in and projects forth from the mind.

-- Technically the tongue is only a physical organ of the body. It speaks only what a person's mind directs it to speak. As such, it functions as a megaphone of what the mind wants audibly broadcast. Therefore, the technical source of all inappropriate speaking is the person's mind.

-- The problem then is two-fold:

--- 1. The mind has sinful things it is thinking; and

--- 2. The mind chooses to vocalize the sinful things it is thinking. (cf. Matthew 12:34b)

-- Here in James, the focus clearly is on the problem of vocalizing sinful things:

--- James 1:26 - we are to "keep a tight rein on [our] tongue"; and

--- James 3:2 - we are not to "stumble" or "be at fault in what [we] say"

-- The tongue, or speaking the sinful things we are thinking, is at the critical lead position of this dynamic.

-- The tongue organ is small but its functioning to speak words can be powerful in relation to what it steers, leads, or controls.

-- Whichever direction one's tongue or speaking goes, the rest of one's life follows that lead.

-- Therefore, the tongue is the key - if we can control the tongue well, the rest of one's life will fall into proper place. (v.2)

BIG IDEA: Your tongue, or your choosing to speak the things on your mind, functions to effectively steer the direction of your life - for good or for evil. (cf. Proverbs 12:18)

APPLICATIONS:

- - We need to exercise wise and careful use of our tongue, because its spoken words have such great potential to do sinfulness and set the course of direction for our life.

- - Are there ways in which you need to make improvements about what you speak? In order to become consistent at only speaking good, you need to develop the habit of self-monitoring your thinking and then intentionally filtering what you are about to say. (cf. Ephesians 4:29; 2 Corinthians 10:5)

- - Most of us do a good job and make extra effort to control our words in public and at church, but we need to also do this at home with our spouse and children. They see and hear what we are really like when we let our guard down at home. They see and hear what our faith really is like. And over time, they will tend to follow what they see in their family life.

- - Are there things you are saying at home that need to be silenced and terminated? How about in the car when you are driving around in a hurry to get somewhere? How about when you are in the back yard barbecuing with friends or relatives? Or when you are working on a challenging home repair? Or right after you hang up the phone from a heated conversation with a difficult person?

How are the words you speak during those times impacting your life as well as other people around you?

- - Your words need to match your actions, which both need to match your faith - in the entirety of your life.

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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