

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Taming the Tongue James 3:1-12 Part Five

We have been examining the Epistle of James. The theme of this epistle is “Tests of Living Faith.” This epistle was written so that we might know whether we are saved or not saved. The first test was the “Response to Trials test” in **James 1:1-18**. The second test was the “Response to the Word test” in **James 1:19-27**. The third test was the “Impartiality test” in **James 2:1-13**. The fourth test was the “Works test” in **James 2:14-24**. We are now considering the fifth test that we have found in this epistle and we are calling this test the “Speech test” in **James 3:1-12**.

How can we know whether or not we have saving faith? How can we know whether or not we are in fact born again? We can know by the way we communicate. We can know by what we say and how we say it. The Bible teaches us that out of the heart the mouth speaks.

In developing this test, James shares with us five different reasons why we should control our tongues. He gives us five different reasons why we should tame our tongues. We have considered 3 of the 5 different reasons. They are:

The tongue’s potential to bring judgment Let us look at **James 3:1**, “**Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.**”

The tongue’s potential to effect the course of our lives Let us look at **James 3:2-4**, “**(2) For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. (3) Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. (4) Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.**”

The tongue’s potential for destruction Let us look at **James 3:5-6** “**(5) So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things, Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (6) And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.**” The uncontrolled tongue is an incredibly powerful tool of destruction and James compares it to the destructive power of fire and there is no more destructive way for the tongue to be used than in evil reporting.

2 Sam. 15 gives us an excellent illustration of the destructiveness of this kind of speech. In this chapter Absalom, the son of King David, distorted facts, gave incomplete facts and flat out lied to the people of Israel about David. He did this out of impure motives. And the people, taking what he said at face value, gave their allegiance to Absalom. The result of this evil reporting led King David to flee the city of Jerusalem for his life and ultimately culminated in a civil war.

I would hope because of the very destructive potential of evil reporting that we would purpose ourselves never to be involved with it in any way, whether that is in the birth of an evil report or it’s growth.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

In order to help with this, two weeks ago we began to answer the question, “How can we avoid becoming involved in giving birth to evil reports?” It begins with us doing three very simple things:

First of all, always pause to reflect before speaking about another person. In **James 1:19** it says, “**This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.**” We are always to be slow about speaking but understanding the destructive power of evil reporting we need to be especially slow. We need to purpose to deliberately pause.

Secondly, while pausing we need to go to prayer. In **Matt.26:41** it says Jesus told His disciples, “**Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.**” The flesh is weak and there is no area of our flesh more prone to temptation than the tongue. So let us prayerfully ponder our words, especially those words which might reflect badly on another person.

And thirdly, when we pray, we need to give special attention to our own sinfulness. We need to give time to examine ourselves and confess any sin that we might find in our lives. Those who tend to be preoccupied with the short comings of others, rather than their own shortcomings, tend to be self-righteous people. Hopefully you remember the words of Jesus to His disciples in **Matt. 7:5**, “**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.**” Hopefully each of us have taken this admonition to heart.

If we would take these three very simple steps, I believe that the possibility of giving birth to an evil report is greatly diminished. But let us say, that after taking all three of these steps, you still feel that it would be appropriate, that it still might be good to share certain negative information about a certain person. If this is the way you might feel, then we must ask the following questions.

Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share?

If we somehow come to believe that a brother or sister in Christ is in sin, and if we believe for some reason that it would be profitable for this sin to be made known to someone, we must first of all make sure we have done everything we are responsible for in regard to that information. This would not simply involve verifying the information, if we are in a position to do that, but it would also involve considering whether or not we should go to that individual. What is our biblical responsibility when we become aware of sin in a fellow believer’s life?

Willful sin is to be confronted privately. If someone believes you are in sin and they believe that they should not keep it to themselves, who would you want them to share it with? Your hairdresser, your neighbor, your classmate, or fellow employee? Who? Typically I believe that the answer to that question would be, “If someone has a problem with me or has something negative to say about me, I wish that they would come to me in person rather than talking behind my back.” Would you think that this might be a common feeling? I would have to believe that it is. Does this approach have some biblical basis? I certainly believe it does. **Matt. 18:15-17**, “**(15) And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**”

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

(16) But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. (17) And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.” When we see a brother or sister in Christ perform sin willfully we need to go to them and make it clear to them the seriousness of their transgression. When we see a brother or sister in Christ perform sin willfully we need to go to them and rebuke them. If they do not listen to us, then and only then are we directed to involve others. Not in a gossiping way, but rather with the intent to enlist them in helping us to restore our sinning brother.

Hopefully we would never have to go through this process of discipline. But we have gone through this in the past and unfortunately it is likely that we will have to go through this process again in the future. But as a word of caution, I would like you to understand that any attempt to follow this process through to its completion must go through the elders of our church. The reason why I am sharing this with you is because many years ago a man felt that in obedience to Matthew 18 he had to inform the church of a certain individual’s sin and he proceeded to mail out a letter to the entire church.

Why was this ill advised? It was ill advised because the elders of the church are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of this church. His action by-passed the very people God had placed in this fellowship to protect the moral, doctrinal, and directional purity of the church. Departing from God’s prescribed design opens the church up to various spiritual dangers.

If you catch someone who is a Christian in a lie, if you know a Christian who is cheating, if you know a Christian who is committing adultery, if you know of a Christian who is sinning willfully, who looks more like an unbeliever than a believer, you have a responsibility to go to that person privately before you go to anyone else. Hopefully your attempt at restoring your brother or sister in Christ will, by God’s grace, be successful. But our responsibility toward our brothers and sisters in Christ does not stop with initiating a course of discipline toward a willfully sinning brother.

We have the additional responsibility of coming alongside those caught in sin with a spirit of gentleness. Listen to the words of Gal. 6:1-5, **“(1) Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (2) Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. (3) For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (4) But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. (5) For each one shall bear his own load.”**

What is the difference between the person who is willfully sinning, who should be rebuked and disciplined, from the person who is caught in a trespass? The man who is sinning willfully wants to continue in his sin and the man caught in his sin does not.

Hopefully we all are striving to live our lives pleasing to the Lord. We want to be better husbands, fathers, employers, employees, students, neighbors. But in the pursuit of holiness we can be suddenly overtaken by the weakness of our flesh.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

When this happens to us, and it very likely will happen, hopefully our brothers and sisters in Christ will not use this occasion of our weakness to exalt themselves or to debase us. Rather, hopefully they will come alongside us and seek to restore us gently.

They will pray for us. They will put their arm around us and seek to bring encouragement to our life. They will think of acts of kindness that will hopefully refresh us. They will speak the truth in love. Spirit-filled individuals are not uninvolved in the lives of their brothers and sisters in Christ, they are actively working to help.

What about those who we see as falling short of the teachings of God's Word but have no sense of guilt, who do not see their sin? How should we handle them? **Matt. 28:19** tells us to **“Go and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit teaching them to do all that I have commanded you.”** Our responsibility would be to come alongside them and teach them. **Eph. 4:15** gives us this very same emphasis when it tells us to **“Speak the truth in love.”** We have a lot of responsibility in regards to our Christian brothers.

Before I will speak to someone about someone else's sin I must first of all know that I have acted responsibly toward that person in light of their transgression. If the transgression is willful then I have a responsibility to go to that person privately before I go to anyone else and rebuke them. If the transgression has not been willful, but rather they have in their weakness, been snared by sin, I have a responsibility to come alongside them and to the best of my ability, and in light of my opportunities, seek to restore them in a spirit of gentleness before I would go to another. If a brother or sister in Christ is unaware of their sin, I need to actively seek to somehow bring to them the truth in such a way that they might receive it and understand it.

This all seems so very clear, but I can guarantee you that there will be times when you will feel the need for reinforcements. Certainly that is the case with the willfully sinning brother because the Scriptures themselves call for us to involve others. But in addition to this there will be times when you might feel you need help with the struggling brother or even the brother who is lacking knowledge. If after doing all that you can do, after you have examined your own personal responsibility and acted on it, you still might feel the need for reinforcements. How can you know whether or not this is a good idea? This leads us to a second question.

Will the information that I am about to share serve some good purpose??

So many people are very quick to pass negative information to their friends and acquaintances about people without any thought about what good purpose that information will serve. Let us say that you are aware that there are two women in your fellowship who are not getting along with each other. What would your responsibility be toward them? Would it not be to approach one or both of them? After approaching them you will very quickly know whether or not you are dealing with a willfully sinning sister in Christ, or a sister who has been caught in sin, or a sister who is just ignorant of God's standards. But let us say that after you have done all that you can, the problem continues to exist. Might it be good to get help? Sure if you believe that the person or persons you are seeking help from can serve some good purpose.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

I believe that we have an illustration of just this very situation in the Scriptures. Listen to the words of Paul in **Phil. 4:2-3** **“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”** Paul became aware of a problem between two women. Obviously he was very limited in respect to his own personal involvement with them. So he chose to share with the Philippian church. Did Paul share negative information about Euodia and Synteche? And the answer, I believe, is yes. He is basically telling the Philippians that Euodia and Syntyche are not getting along with each other. Here are two women who apparently have been caught in a trespass. Paul does not look upon them as hardened willful sinners. But he views them as co-laborers with himself and others in the cause of the Gospel. But they have been snared by sin and need to be restored. Paul is reaching out to the Philippians and shares what he does share to serve a very good purpose. And that was to enlist the Philippians in helping these two women to get along with each other.

Now I would like to give you two precautions. If you ever feel like you need help in restoring a brother or sister in Christ, you need to consider the following two guidelines.

Be sure that the individual you are approaching for help is perceived as friendly by the person you are attempting to restore. People are not likely to be open to what you are saying or be open to what others are saying if they perceive that you do not have their personal best interest at heart.

I shared with you several weeks ago that over 20 years ago there was a woman who truly believed that I was in sin. She had, for certain reasons come to believe that I was unloving, manipulative, and unteachable. If she truly wanted to win me over to her perspective and restore me, she needed to work at being perceived as my friend. It would have been wise of her, if she felt she needed some help in this restoration process, to include my friends. It would have been wise of her to include people in this process who I knew had my best interest at heart. If this is not done the person you are seeking to restore may question who you are seeking to serve.

A second caution we need to keep in mind if we reach out for help from others is to be sure that you do not by-pass those people who are personally responsible for the spiritual oversight of the person you are concerned about. This could be the parent or a church leader. If you are in a growth group and if you feel as if you need help in restoring a brother or sister in Christ, you need to consider approaching the growth group leader. If you are in a youth group and you feel that you need help in restoring a young person within the youth group, you need to consider going to their parents or their youth leader. What you don't want to do is to go to someone who has no vested interest in the person you are concerned about and who has very little personal or biblical resources to bring to the solution.

Before we would ever consider sharing what could be considered negative information about another person, we need to ask some very simple questions. Have I acted responsibly in regard to the information that I am about to share? And will the information I am about to share serve some good purpose? Finally, the third question that would be helpful to ask is,

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Have I considered how to share this information in the most positive light?

There is a very well known biblical truth that I believe that we are all familiar with. It is called the “Golden Rule.” It is found in **Matt. 7:12**. What does it say? Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

If you seek to enlist the help of others in the restoration of a member of the body of Christ, no matter who they might be, speak as well as you can about that individual.

Isn't that what we saw in **Phil. 4:2,3** **“I urge Euodia and I urge Synteché to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”** He did not say help these women poor women who are just mean spirited, unforgiving, witches. If they could just get their eyes off their pettiness they might be of some use to someone.

CONCLUSION

The uncontrolled tongue is a fire. It is the very world of iniquity. It sets on fire the entire course of our lives and it is set on fire by hell itself.

In terms of the destructive power of the tongue, there is no greater illustration of it than the evil report.

In light of this fact, we need, as believers to purpose ourselves never to be involved with it in any way, whether that is in its birth or in its growth. How can we avoid becoming involved in giving birth to evil reports?”

We first of all need to pause before speaking about another for the purpose of prayer. In our prayer we need to be examining our own lives and confessing our sins.

After having done this, we are then and only then prepared to ask certain very important questions of ourselves before we feel the freedom to say anything negative about another person. What are those questions?

Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share?

Will this information I am about to share serve some good purpose?

Have I considered how to share this information in the very best possible light?