

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Taming the Tongue James 3:1-12 Part Seven

We have been examining the Epistle of James. The theme of this epistle is “Tests of Living Faith.” We are now considering the fifth test which we have called the “Speech test.” How can we know whether or not we have a living faith, a saving faith? We can know by the way we speak. We can know by what we say and by what we don’t say.

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 which we saw in **James 3:1**.

The tongue’s potential to effect the entire course of our lives which we saw in **James 3:2-4**.

The tongue’s potential to bring destruction which we saw in **James 3:5-6**. The uncontrolled tongue is an incredibly powerful tool of destruction and James compares it to the destructive power of fire and in the various destructive expressions of the tongue, there is no more destructive expression than in evil reporting.

An evil report involves distorted facts, incomplete facts and false information. And it is given with impure motives.

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

First of all, always pause to reflect before speaking about another person.

Secondly, while pausing we need to go to prayer.

And thirdly, when we pray we need to give priority to our own sinfulness.

After following these three very basic guidelines, we are prepared to ask ourselves three very basic questions

The first question is: “Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share? We should not be going to another until we have done all that we can for a fellow believer whose shortcomings we are about to share.

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If our Christian brother's shortcomings involves willful sin we have the responsibility to go to him and rebuke him according to **Matt.18:15-17**

If our Christian brother's shortcomings involve an inability to extract himself from a sin that he wants to be set free from, we have the responsibility to come alongside of him in a spirit of gentleness to restore him according to **Gal.6:1-5**

If our Christian brother's shortcomings involve an unawareness of God's biblical standards we have the responsibility to teach him according to **Mt. 28:19** and to speak the truth in love according to **Eph.4:15**

We should not seriously consider sharing a fellow believer's shortcomings until we have acted upon what we know our personal responsibility to be toward them.

What is the first question that we need to ask? "Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share?"

The second question that I gave you last week was: "Will the information that I am about to share serve some good purpose?" Will sharing this information help in some way to restore or mature a sinning brother? If your answer to this question is Yes! Then my strong encouragement would be to go and share whatever information you might think is helpful with the ministry leader that the elders have formally set aside to minister to the person you are concerned about or go to the elders themselves and humbly submit to their counsel.

The third question that we would need to ask would be: Have I considered how to share this information in the most positive light possible following the principle of "doing unto others as you would have them do toward you?"

Now we are going on to examine the fourth reason James gives us for controlling the tongue. Not only should we seek to control the tongue because of it's potential to bring judgment, to effect the entire course of our lives, and it's potential to bring destruction, but we need to strive to keep our tongue under control because of it's potential to become unruly.

The Tongue's Potential To Become Unruly

Let us read **VV. 7-8, "For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. (8) But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. James's point in these two verses is simply that the human tongue is innately uncontrollable and untamable. It is wild, undisciplined, irresponsible, irrepressible and savage, more so than any other creature.**

Whether the creature is one that walks or flies such as "**beasts and birds**" or the creature is one that crawls or swims such as "**reptiles and creatures of the sea,**" the tongue is more unpredictable, more unstable, more volatile, more unruly.

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In making this point James states that every species of beasts, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea has been tamed by the human race. What does he mean by this? Does he mean that every species has been domesticated so you can keep them in your house? Certainly this is not true. Does he mean that every species though not in your house has been able to be trained to do certain tricks? Such as a whale giving a ride to a trainer at Sea World, or an elephant standing on it's hind legs? Though certainly to some degree we have all seen some very amazing examples of beasts, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea trained to do very amazing things, this really does not capture the thought that James is communicating in this passage.

The word that is used (DAMAZO) is found in one other passage in the New Testament besides **James 3:7** and that is **Mark 5:4**. In this passage it is speaking about a demon possessed man who lived among the tombs in the country of the Gerasenes. And even though they had attempted to use shackles and chains in order to bring him under control no one was able, it says, to “subdue” him. The word DAMAZO is best understood as “subdue.”

If we use this word to replace the word “tame” it would read, **“For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is subdued, and has been subdued by the human race. (8) But no one can subdue the tongue.”**

When we read this phrase, **“But no one can subdue the tongue,”** we should not say, “If this is true why should I even try?” The reason why you should try is because, though you may not be able to do this in your strength, the Lord certainly can accomplish this in His strength. If we would follow the guidelines that I have shared with you, we will be spiritually prepared to find our way when we ask the appropriate questions.

James, in this passage is not wanting us to lose hope of ever controlling the tongue. But he does want us to understand that we will never control our tongue apart from the the Lord's help. Why? Because **“For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is subdued, and has been subdued by the human race. (8) But no one can subdue the tongue.”**

But James again reminds us of the destructive nature of the tongue. He did this earlier in this passage by comparing the tongue to fire. But now he does this by describing it as a **“restless evil, full of deadly poison.”**

“Restless” translates (AKATASTATOS), the same word rendered “unstable” in James 1:8. It characterizes the tongue as being fickle; it cannot be trusted to stay submissively in its proper place. It is notoriously unreliable, constantly prone to break out in vicious words. The adjective suggests the picture of some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down in its den.

The nature of the tongue is “evil,” degraded in character and prone to be injurious. If it ever does in fact slip out of it's cage it will do damage. And the damage certainly can be lethal. Why? Because it is full of **“deadly poison.”**

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David was a soldier's soldier, a man of military renown who had fought powerful enemies. But he realized that the most dangerous enemies are those who attack with words. He therefore prayed in **Ps. 64:1-10. "Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from the dread of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, from the tumult of those who do iniquity, who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow, to shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly; they say, "Who can see them?." They devise injustices, saying, "We are ready with a well-conceived plot"; for the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep.** (Though the tongue is incredibly destructive the passage goes on to give us some comfort). **But God will shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they will be wounded. So they will make him stumble; their own tongue is against them; all who see them will shake the head. Then all men will fear, and they will declare the work of God, and will consider what He has done. The righteous man will be glad in the Lord and will take refuge in Him; and all the upright in heart will glory."** Though God is pictured as an avenger, this still does not diminish the fact of the destructiveness of the tongue when it is not controlled.

The poisonous lies of Laban's sons against Jacob drove him and his family out of the land and devastated Laban's own home and family life (Gen. 31). The venomous tongue of Doeg the Edomite lying to King Saul about David and Ahimelech the priest resulted in the brutal massacre of eighty-five priests as well as the entire priestly city of Nob (1 Sam. 22:9-19). The deceitful princes of Ammon also lied about David accusing him of hypocrisy in honoring Nahash, their king, and Hanun, his son and successor. Believing the lies, Hanun assembled an enormous force of his own soldiers, along with Aramean mercenaries, of which some of his own soldiers, along with Aramean mercenaries, of which some seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen and their commander were needlessly slaughtered by David's forces - all because of a lie (2 Sam. 10). When Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to King Ahab, Queen Jezebel conspired to have two men falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy, which resulted in his being stoned to death (1 Kings 21:1-13). As recorded in the book of Esther, Satan attempted to use the lies of Haman to exterminate exiled Jews in Medo-Persia, but was thwarted by Esther and her cousin, Mordecai. Our Lord Himself was put to death because of lies (Matt. 26:57-60). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death because he was falsely accused of blaspheming Moses and God (Acts 6:8-7:60).

Why should we be so concerned about controlling our tongue? Because of its potential to become unruly. And if it ever breaks out of its cage and begins to spread evil reports, it will be like a deadly poison.

We certainly need to control our tongues. We need to tame our tongue. There is no area of speech that is so potentially destructive as evil reporting because its venom can infect so many. Because of this, I have been hoping that through this series of messages that you would have purposed never to become involved either in the birth of an evil report or its spread.

I have already given you some hints about how not to become involved in its birth but now I would like to help you in not becoming involved in its spread. The first step is knowing how to detect a carrier of an evil report.

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A carrier will usually test your spirit before giving you an evil report. Any evidence of a compatible spirit in you will encourage him to give you the report. Why are some people continually receiving negative and destructive information about people? Because they have proven themselves to be open to such information. If you are someone who is not known for trafficking in gossip and slander, the carrier will need to be more careful with you. How will they do this?

A carrier will usually check your acceptance before giving the report to you. He may do this by asking for your opinion about a particular person. What do you think of Dave or Paul or Dale? If your response would be considered negative or hostile, the carrier will be encouraged to share with you.

Or a carrier will often get you to ask for the evil report by creating curiosity for it. He may ask you, “Have you heard about (the person)?”

Or a carrier may communicate an evil report by asking you for counsel or by sharing a concern for the person involved. Be careful.

Or a carrier may communicate an evil report by asking you to pray for someone that he or she is concerned about and then use that opportunity to share with you vivid details of some perceived evil.

The first step in protecting ourselves from spreading an evil report is knowing how to detect a carrier and in knowing how they operate. The second step is knowing how to respond when confronted with what you might think is an evil report.

Ask them if they have gone to those directly involved. Remember that they have personal responsibilities to a sinning brother. If they haven't, and you see clearly what they need to do, encourage them to do that. And hold them accountable for doing it. But if they have fulfilled their responsibilities or if you are unsure about whether they have fulfilled their personal responsibilities, then you need to ask the second question.

Ask them if they have gone to the elders or to someone that the elders have formally set aside to assist them in ministry. If they have that is wonderful and if they haven't they should be encouraged to do so before you can carry on any further conversation with them. But if they say they have done this, ask a final question.

Ask them the reason why they are coming to you with this report. And hopefully they can explain to you why they have done this. It should involve your active participation in the restoration and maturing of your Christian brother or sister and not just be a request for counsel or for prayer. Why? Because, if it was for counsel or for prayer, they could have gone to the elders or to someone who has been set aside by the elders to assist them in the ministry of oversight for prayer or for counsel.

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The tongue is a restless evil full of deadly poison but if we will prepare ourselves spiritually, following the three guidelines that I have suggested, I believe we will have positioned ourselves in such a way that we can avoid giving birth to an evil report by asking the 3 questions that I have suggested. And I believe you can avoid spreading an evil report by understanding how to detect a carrier and how to respond anytime anyone approaches you with information that could be harmful to another person's reputation, family, ministry or career.

But someone might say, "These suggestions are dealing exclusively with our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ." With the unsaved world we are not here to clean up the lives of our unsaved bosses, supervisors, fellow workers, employees, neighbors, or acquaintances. If people want to engage us in conversation about unsaved people, you can make it clear to those people that your only concern for the unsaved world is that they would come to know Christ as their Lord and Savior. And then you can transition the conversation over to their own walk in Christ and I will guarantee to you that you will find that people will not at all be eager to share with you the sins and shortcomings of others.

CONCLUSION

Why should we control or tame our tongues?

We should control or tame our tongue because of the tongue's potential to bring judgment which we saw in **James 3:1**.

We should control or tame our tongue because of the tongue's potential to effect the entire course of our lives which we saw in **James 3:2-4**.

We should control or tame our tongue because of the tongue's potential to bring destruction which we saw in **James 3:5-6**.

Finally, we should control or tame our tongue because of the tongue's potential to be unruly and to spread its deadly poison which we see in **James 3:7-8**.

Hopefully, in light of the tongue's unruly nature, we will be particularly vigilant never to become involved in the birth of an evil report or its spread. And rather than our tongue becoming an instrument of death, it can be an instrument to bring life.