

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 3:6-8

James 3:6

(KJV) 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.

(NIV) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

Words can kill. When a wicked, deceitful, unredeemed heart conceives evil, it then seeks expression through the tongue—words are formed on our lips, and the fire is lit. James calls upon Jewish religious imagery here to illustrate the raging inferno that is the sin nature unhinged—namely that of Gehenna.

From Webster's Dictionary:

GEHEN'NA,n. [Heb. ge-hinom, the valley of Hinom, in which was Tophet, where the Israelites sacrificed their children to Moloch. 2 Ki 23:10.]

This word has been used by the Jews as equivalent to hell, place of fire or torment and punishment, and the Greek word is rendered by our translators by hell and hell-fire. Matthew 18:9. 23.15.

Matthew 18:7-9

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Matthew 23:15

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

James 3:6 graphically depicts how our words of anger, slander, and malice corrupt our whole body, setting everyone and everything in our lives on fire—fuelled and stoked from nothing less than the devil's burning abode, Gehenna!

It is no coincidence that our fallen sin nature—disconnected from the righteousness of Christ—also finds its eventual eternal home in hell:

Galations 5:19-21

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and

envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Keeping the context of James 3 in the front of our minds, we see why James is so passionately graphic with word pictures that he knows won't be lost on corrupting Jewish Christian leaders and their wrong-hearted alliances. Those who teach, preach, and lead have the potential to lead astray with their words and actions. They will be called to account:

Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

1Peter 5:1-4

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Whom can you call to mind as being part of your sphere of influence? How do you think your words have affected persons in this sphere for good or bad?

*Find six Scriptures in the Old or New Testament that speak to the tongue and/or self control. Commit them to memory and track how the Holy Spirit uses them in your heart and life.

James 3:7

(KJV) For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

(NIV) All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,

In matters of earthly dominion, God has laid out very clear instructions for us:

Genesis 1:24-28

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:

and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And to some extent, we have fulfilled God's instructions for whatever brief periods of time before and after the corrupt deviations that make us distinctly human—and fallen. But when it comes to controlling our tongues, James—to say nothing of God Himself—gives us a failing grade:

James 3:8

(KJV) But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

(NIV) but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Now for the believer in Jesus, this is not the final verse, and certainly not the final word. God's Word explicitly lays out for us the reality of a second-by-second battle between our flesh and spirit—both finding their expression from our hearts (Luke 6:45; Proverbs 4:23) en route to our tongues.

Our victory over the flesh—over our fiery words—is the cross of Jesus. We crucify the wicked tongue and its words of death and we speak life through the power of His resurrection within us. Hallelujah!

Galatians 5:16-26

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland