

Tongues

by Ingimar De Ridder

The sermon warns against the destructive power of the tongue and encourages believers to control their speech to foster unity within the church.

Scripture: Proverbs 17:20, Matthew 12:34, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ephesians 4:29, James 3:6

Topics: "Taming The Tongue", "Church Discipline"

Description

Ingimar De Ridder preaches about the destructive power of the tongue within the church, emphasizing the need to guard against gossip, lies, and evil speaking that can lead to division and ruin. He warns about the range of influence the tongue has, comparing it to a pebble causing ripples in a pond, and shares examples of how innocent words can have evil intentions. De Ridder highlights the importance of preventing 'religious forest fires' caused by tongues on fire through avoiding gossip, complaining, and flattery, and encourages believers to keep their mouths closed if they cannot tame their tongues.

Transcript

A Lesson from James to the Churches

Watch out when tongues get loose. They can do a lot of damage. Nothing saddens the heart more than to hear of local churches divided, broken and destroyed by the Devil. It is especially sad when good churches are needed to be winning souls for Christ. The Devil has many devices which he uses to split a church and to divide one brother from another. Let there be no mistake about it, the Devil hates the church. Today, a church is more likely to be destroyed from within than from without.

Within the church there is one member everyone had better watch out for. If allowed to, this member can cause much havoc and chaos. This little member is the tongue. Satan often uses this uncontrolled member to destroy the unity and harmony of a local assembly. God warns us about this potential danger. He warns us about the problem of tongues.

The tongues problem in question is not the one in Acts chapter two, that is a "tongue of fire." I am speaking rather of the tongues in James chapter three, which is a "tongue on fire."

Tongues, I believe, is the besetting sin of many believers (including myself). Dear Lord Jesus, teach us the awfulness of this evil phenomenon called "tongues." Amen.

I. THE RAGE OF THE TONGUE

James 3:6 tells us that the tongue is a fire, and what a fire it is! Now, fire is a very useful thing when controlled and in its proper place. It is a real blessing when it is controlled on the stove, but what a terror when it is on the bed or the sofa. Every precaution must be taken to keep fire in its proper place. While we enjoy the flames dancing upon the log in the fireplace we must never let down our guard or become careless, lest a beautiful experience becomes a tragedy. Whole forests have gone up in smoke because someone was careless. Much sorrow and loss of life has begun with a spark. Yes, the tongue is a raging fire that must be kept under control.

Let us now look at some examples of this rage and evil of the tongue. Slander, gossip, lies and evil speaking are all ungodly things. Before WWII the Nazis first spoke with contempt and disdain about the Jews before they broke their shop windows and then turned them into the gas chambers. The furnace of hatred is still billowing ashes around the world today. Much of the German propaganda machine was fueled by hatred and envy.

Even the truth about someone's weakness or shortcomings can be used to hurt him. Innocent sounding words can have evil intentions. The tongue is a fire. Who has not felt the heat of it upon their own lives and reputations? Yes, the tongue is a fire. Oh, be careful of the devastation it can cause.

II. THE RANGE OF THE TONGUE

In verse five of the same chapter, we are told that the tongue is a "little member." Its littleness, however, does not limit its range of influence. It has been said that a lie can travel around the world twice while truth is still getting its boots on.

We must be aware of the range of this weapon of Satan. Just as a pebble dropped into a pond will send ripples to the farthest shore, so a word ill spoken will eventually reach the farthest ears and do its damage.

There is a story told about a woman who was a gossip and had spread lies and slander all over town about a godly servant of Christ. The day came when she was convicted about her wrong doing and wanted to clear her conscience. She came to the man and asked forgiveness for speaking such false things about him. The man said, "I will forgive you but there is one thing I must ask you to do first." He instructed her to "Get a bag full of feathers and come back and see me." Although this seemed to be a strange request, she complied and returned with the feathers. "Now I want you to go and place a feather on the doorstep of every person you have spoken to about me." She again complied and returned. The wise man then said, "Now I want you to go back and gather up all the feathers you have left and bring them back to me."

After a time, she returned explaining that the wind had apparently blown them away and there was no recapturing them. The man then went on to explain, "Yes, no chance, and so it is with a word once it is spoken. It can never be recaptured again. The wind will carry gossip like a feather from one house to another and all the repentance in the world will not undo the damage done." The woman went home in tears realizing that she had caused so much harm. This brings us to the pain cause by the tongue.

III. THE RUIN OF THE TONGUE

Verse eight of James 3 speaks of the "unruly evil" of the tongue. Whole cities have been reduced to ashes by uncontrolled fire. The devastation and destruction of fire is well known to all. Fire is one of the most destructive forces at our disposal. We must be careful with fire. A house can burn to the ground in

minutes. So too, a man's life can be greatly harmed in minutes by false, unkind, or careless words. The tongue "on fire" has left the reputation of many a man or woman in rubble. Its damage can be catastrophic.

Being sorry will not restore a building from a pile of ashes, nor will it retrieve destructive evil words, or restore a damaged name, or mend a broken heart.

We have seen the rage of the tongue, the range of the tongue, and the ruin of the tongue. We will all agree to the seriousness of a fire gone out of control. We will also agree that evil tongues can severely damage a church fellowship or ministry, making it either powerless or a poor testimony to the world (which is the same thing). What can we do to prevent such a tragedy?

There are three ways a fire can be started:

- 1) By carelessness. Many homes have been destroyed and lives lost to fire because of careless people.
- 2) By accident. Through no real neglect, an appliance has been known to catch fire.
- 3) By intent. This intentional fire-starting is called arson.

ARSON

The arsonist is someone who slinks about in the shadows with his gasoline and oil-soaked rags. After he has done his evil work, he will often stand openly looking innocent among the crowd watching the holocaust.

If you saw someone about to set your church building on fire, you would call the police, I am sure. But what if someone was trying to burn down the spiritual closeness and sweet spirit of that very same church? Would you not be concerned?

The spiritual arsonist goes about with the gasoline of gossip and the filthy rags of rumor and slander. If allowed to do his dirty work, he would leave the church in ashes. Don't let him do it.

What are the oily rags an arsonist would use? First, there is the rag of gossip. Proverbs 17:20 says "He that hath a perverse heart findeth no good; and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth to mischief." Prov. 18:8 says, "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, they go down into the inner most parts."

Prov. 20:19 says, "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets." If someone comes to you with a hand cupped over his mouth to "share" a "secret" watch out, he might be a spiritual arsonist. The same verse goes on to say. "Meddle not with him."

Prov. 26:20 says, "where no wood is the fire goes out." The fire will die if you do not add any wood. Do not add to the fires of gossip. Refuse to throw a log or twig onto that fire.

Another arsonist's rag is a complaining spirit. It is combustible. We are told in Numbers 11:1 that complaining displeases the Lord. God is never pleased to hear us complain. When something is not right, there is a correct way to deal with it. Complaining is not the way. Numbers 14:27 tells us that it was for their complaining that the Israelites fell in the wilderness. First Corinthians 10:10 tells us that, for this they were destroyed. In Numbers 12 we see that complaining brought leprosy to Miriam. In Numbers 21 complaining brought fiery serpents. Beware of the complainer.

Complaining is like a smoldering rag that is about to burst into flames. For this reason, Paul admonishes us to do all things without murmuring and disputings. Don't play with these matches or with those who do.

Another trick of the Devil is to use flattery. Gossip is cotton, flattery is silk. Both rags burn as well in the fire. Flattery, if it works, will ignite someone's pride, and "pride goeth before destruction. Flattery comes off an evil tongue. "Psalm 5:9 speaks of flattery as an "open grave." Psalm 12:1-3 we see that God hates flattery. Proverbs 29:5 says "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet."

HOW TO PREVENT RELIGIOUS FOREST FIRES

First Corinthians 10:13 says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

1. One way to "escape" committing this sin of tongues is to keep your mouth closed. I have never heard of someone criticizing another while his or her mouth was closed. James speaks of the tongue as an animal to be tamed. If you are not able to tame it, just keep it in its cage. Close your mouth. May we bite our lip before we bite another with ungracious words.

2. If you do not want to start a fire, don't carry wood or oily rags around with you. Anger or dissatisfaction must be dealt with properly or it will burst into flames at the first provocation.

I heard of a fire that started with a pile of old rags and spontaneous combustion. They just sat smoldering until someone came along and opened the door. The flames shot up as the air rushed in and fed the flame. So too, in many a heart, there can be smoldering hurts and resentments just waiting for the door to be opened. If there is a smoldering hurt in your heart, ask the Lord to pour the water of his Word and grace upon it, before it hurts you worse, or hurts others and the work of God.

If you come upon a spiritually destructive fire such as criticism or gossip, what should you do? First, refuse to feed it. Do not contribute to its flames. If someone complains to you about the preacher, Sunday School teacher, the church program, or any of a million things one can complain about, don't encourage it. If you are not a trash collector, make sure someone is not just "dumping" their garbage on you.

Second, refuse to spread it around. Many times, a person passes the arson's torch from house to house via the telephone and a, "have you heard?" Remember, we must all give an account of ourselves to God for the words that we speak.

3. Sound the fire alarm. We must all learn to sound the alarm. If someone comes to you with a juicy tid-bit of information that sounds like gossip or an unconstructive criticism, tell that person that he or she is wrong. Be firm, but loving and point out the seriousness of carrying the oily rags of arson.

There is a right way to handle a complaint or concern. The Bible gives a model of conduct in such a situation. In Matthew 18:15 it says "if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." If one does not like the way someone has done something, he should go to that person first. Unfortunately, someone often "shares" the problem with a few choice friends, and by the time the offending party is approached and informed of the offense, a small fire is already burning in the hearts of others.

Even if the originator of this fire is satisfied after going to the offending party, there is no guarantee that those who "took up" the hurt will be able to extinguish the fire that has begun to burn in their own hearts. They may not be able to forgive or forget the hurt you felt. Long after you have forgiven and forgotten they may still carry the fire. Perhaps they have their own little hurts, which are nothing big in themselves, but are fanned into flames by your gossip or criticism.

If, after going to the party who has wronged us, we get no satisfaction, we are to take two or three witnesses and again approach this person with a loving spirit. If we still get no satisfaction, then we are to take it before the church. In a church situation, one or two of the witnesses should go to the leadership, the elders or deacons. Of course, the last recourse is to go to the congregation.

The children used to sing a song; "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Not true! Words cannot only hurt, they can destroy. Unkind words can kill joy, harmony, unity, and peace in a ministry.

May the Lord, place a guard at our lips that every word might be checked before it is allowed to enter the world. Ephesians 4:29 admonishes us "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Matthew 12:34-37 tells us that what we say reveals what we are. Let us also remember that we will have to give an account to God for every idle word we speak.

Yes, more churches are destroyed by "tongues on fire" than by "tongues of fire." *

Lord, we pray that our speech would always be seasoned with salt and that we would never be guilty of evil speaking. May our words be carefully chosen and guided by your Spirit. Make us aware of the dangerous potential for destruction that is in the tongue; and may we allow you to control and approve our every word. Amen.

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