

The Tongue Is a Fire - James 3

by Phil Beach Jr.

The sermon emphasizes the importance of controlling our tongues and the need for heart change through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 33:41

Scripture: James 3:1

Topics: "Tongue", "The Power of Words", "Heart Transformation"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. emphasizes the profound impact of the tongue, as discussed in James 3, highlighting its potential for both destruction and edification. He reflects on James' personal journey from being controlled by 'hellfire' to being transformed by 'Holy Ghost fire,' illustrating that the tongue reveals the true state of the heart. The sermon urges believers to recognize the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to reign in their hearts to control their words and actions. Beach warns that the tongue, if unchecked, can lead to great harm, and stresses the necessity of heart transformation for true change. Ultimately, he calls for a daily surrender to Jesus, encouraging believers to seek deeper spiritual growth.

Transcript

The message is found in James chapter 4. James chapter 4. The message is found in James chapter 4. James chapter 4. Now, as we had mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit is seeking to overcome the believer's life. It has been said before that if you want to be an overcomer, you must be overcome. James chapter 4. Now, the epistle of James was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus.

And I just would like to make a few comments at this time that will give us, I believe, a better insight into why James wrote so strongly and so sternly. One of the major subjects of James' epistle is the tongue. And I strongly believe that one of the reasons why is because James did a lot of damage with his tongue.

Because, of course, he grew up in his house. And I'm sure James was very, very many times quick to speak and slow to listen. And that's why he told these believers be slow to speak and quick to listen.

I'm sure there were many times that James brought offense to many people by saying things that he shouldn't have said, probably about the Lord Jesus himself. He had made quick conclusions, quick rash statements about things, and then later discovered that they were wrong and that they were incorrect. And then once the Holy Spirit gained entrance into James' life, James began to learn and began to change.

And the product is the book of James. Before we have a man who was controlled by, listen, listen now carefully. Before we have a man who was controlled by hellfire, he was controlled by hellfire.

Now we have a man who's controlled by Holy Ghost fire. James understood that when the tongue is ignited by hellfire, it can be a great, great tool in the hands of Satan that can do a lot of damage to a lot of people. But he also learned that when the tongue gets under control of the Holy Ghost fire, it becomes a tool in the hands of God that builds, that edifies, that lifts up, that encourages, and that never wounds.

Never wounds. Beloved, as a mirror reflects the true image of your face, even so does the tongue reflect the true state of the heart. I'll say that again.

As a mirror reflects the true image of your face, even so the tongue is a mirror. And it reflects, by what it says, the true condition of the heart. Now we're going to read the exhortation from James, and we're going to learn some interesting things.

And remember now, never make this separate. Now it's time for the sermon. No, no, this is all part of the flow of God.

What did the Holy Spirit do at the beginning? He was revealing His presence. He was coming in His power. But He wants to get an inroad in our heart.

Now we're going to learn about the tongue, and we're going to discover that the tongue is an uncontrollable member, and you can't tame it. The only way to get to the tongue is to get to the heart. You can cut your tongue off and still have an evil heart.

Hellfire or Holy Ghost fire? What influences you? You say, preacher, I'm a Christian. Hellfire can't influence me. Yes, it can.

Yes, it can. And we'll see that James himself tells us. But I thank God that not only can hellfire influence us, but heaven fire can influence us too.

And it's my desire this morning that God will show us the need to let Him have our hearts more and more and more. Because you can't reform your tongue unless your heart is changed. And you can't change your heart unless you bow before Jesus and say, Lord, here it is.

Take it. James chapter 4. I'm sorry. James chapter 3. My brethren.

Now James is speaking to Christians. Be not many masters. Now the word there, master, simply means a teacher.

But now let me just make this very clear. I do not believe that James was limiting this exhortation to the gift of teaching. You know how in Ephesians chapter 4 we have apostle and prophet and evangelist and pastor and teacher.

I don't believe James was telling these believers, don't be a teacher as described in Ephesians chapter 4. I don't think that James was limiting this to that. I think what James was suggesting when he said, don't be many teachers. In other words, don't be so quick to influence and teach someone by talking.

You could be a teacher if you've got five people over your house and you do all the talking. Being a teacher doesn't mean that you stand behind the pulpit with the Bible and you have a blackboard and you

say, okay, now we're going to learn. You're teaching people at your job by what you say.

You're teaching the cashiers at the supermarkets a lot about yourself. When they listen to what you say, you're teaching your children. When they listen to you, you're teaching your husband, you're teaching your wife.

So let's take this out of the idea of being a recognized teacher and let's bring it right down to real life so that nobody can feel excluded. Okay? My brethren, be not many masters knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. Now the word there simply means the greater judgment.

Didn't Jesus say that men would give an account for every word they spoke? He did, didn't he? Now that's an awesome thought. We don't often think of that. But our words are being recorded in heaven.

And Jesus said there's coming a day. Now this doesn't just mean the sinner, this means the believer. The believer is going to give an account before the Lord Jesus Christ of every word that we have spoken.

Now beloved, we don't have to go any further than that. We could just spend 15 minutes meditating on that and get a revelation of that. That's enough to bring us through the next six months.

Think about it, beloved. You and I will someday stand before the blessed Son of God and give an account for what came out of our mouth. Now if that doesn't want, if that doesn't cause you to want to learn to be slow to speak and swift to hear, I don't know what will.

Knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment. See, James is saying the more, the more that comes from your mouth, the more you're going to be held accountable for. That's why the book of Proverbs is filled with sayings about wise people who don't say much.

And before they talk, they think. You know the Bible says a wise man studies before he answers. In other words, he contemplates.

He considers the consequences of what he's about to say. Someone comes to you for advice. Do you study before you speak? Or do you speak quickly and foolishly? Do you draw quick conclusions about things the moment you see them? And immediately rolling out of your mouth is a conclusion that you've made.

And others are listening to this conclusion. You know in one place the Bible says in James chapter 4 verse number 2, ye lust and have not ye kill. When I was a young Christian, I couldn't understand how these Christians were killing each other.

I said, what was wrong with them? I would never kill anybody. But then I learned that the word murder and kill, when used in the New Testament, is not always talking about a physical death. But you kill somebody when you slander their character.

When you slander a person's character, you are committing murder. When it's your intent to belittle somebody in the presence of somebody else, and not speak the truth in love, beloved God looks down and weeps. Ye lust and have not ye kill, and desire to have.

Now how many have ever looked at saying something about somebody that's not edifying, and that's not necessary as an act of murder? Now we don't want to be harsh this morning. Don't want to be harsh or anything. But beloved, we need to consider the whole counsel of God.

The Holy Spirit, for you who have been with us for the past couple years, He has come in such incredible ways. But the whole counsel of God is not only does God accept us just the way we are, not only does He pour out His love unconditionally, even if last night we were all in sin, we could come here and God would still reveal that He loves us. But that's not the whole counsel of God.

That's only half of it. Paul said, I shun not from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. So the other half is this, God loves you just the way you are, but He's not satisfied until you're changed.

No, His acceptance isn't any less. Love is love is love, beloved. But He wants a change, and that is what He's working for.

Verse number 2, James chapter 3, for in many things we offend all. That simply means we who talk a lot have the potential to bring a stumbling block to listeners, because words have a great, great impact. I mean, just think if you were on your way to a steak restaurant and you met a buddy.

Oh, that place is chunky. I had a steak last night and there was green stuff on it. No doubt you would probably change your course of direction and go somewhere else.

So just think, the one statement that you said greatly influenced that person. Probably McDonald's will get you. McDonald's is always a good alternative.

That's what it means. For in many things we offend all. Now, if any man offend not in word, that means if any man is not by his words causing somebody to stumble, James says that man is perfect and able also to bridle the whole body.

Now, I want to give you an illustration, and don't laugh at my drawing because I'm not an artist. Now, it's only 1225. We won't be long.

Now, I'm gonna make him sad, and you'll see why. I'll make him happy. I'm telling you, my seven-year-old daughter, Christina, can draw people better than I can.

Now, we're gonna put a heart in here, all right, and we're gonna put a heart on this one. Now, they both have hearts, but this one's sad. I'm gonna even put some tears.

Okay, now watch this. Follow me carefully. Verse 2, we're gonna read it again.

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. Now, let me just explain to you what the word perfect means in this particular place.

The word perfect in this particular place suggests a person who has come to completion, who has come to full age, who has matured and come into adulthood. Okay, so this is the same word that Jesus uses in the Beatitudes when he says, be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father which is in heaven is perfect. Paul said in Philippians chapter 3, as many as are perfect are thus minded regarding his exposition of having one goal, and that is to be like Jesus.

Paul said, whoever among you is an adult Christian, they're gonna have the same attitude I have, but if they don't, God will reveal it to them someday. You see, so that's the idea here. When the Scripture says be perfect, it's saying be mature, be full-grown, be developed in your spiritual stature.

Now, James suggests that a mature person is not going to offend by his word. Now, watch this. As a result, he is able to what? Bridle the whole body.

Now, watch this illustration. Now, to bridle the body is to control it. When you put a bridle on the horse's mouth, what does that mean? You control it.

You direct it. You tell it to go right and it does. You tell it to go left and it does.

You pull on the reins and it stops. The bridle suggests this. A man who is mature, he doesn't offend in his word, and he controls his body.

He's in control of his body. Now, watch this. We've got a sad man here.

Now, we're gonna do this. T-H-R-O-N. That's a throne and this is a throne, okay? The perfect man, the mature man, the developed man has had open-heart surgery, spiritually speaking, and self has been taken off the throne through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, what goes with self? Sin and self are almost inseparable. And King Jesus has come and he's sitting on the throne and he's reigning. So consequently, when the heart is dealt with, the reign of Christ or the rulership of Christ is seen in the believer's body, in the believer's life, in what the believer does.

So, the actions of our body are reflections of who's reigning on the heart. Now, this believer, who's sad and crying, is full of self-life. And when self-life is on the throne, then sin, in word and in deed, reign.

And consequently, when the throne is full of self, then the body, listen, the body obeys the dictates of the one who's sitting on the throne. See, the body becomes the scepter, the manifestation of the power that's on the throne. The mayor sits on the town seat and she makes a decision and her workers obey it.

When self sits on the throne and self wishes and self desires, the body obeys it. The body fulfills the wishes of self, which results in words that are not edifying, actions that are not edifying, sins that we can't overcome, that beset us and beset us. Now, verse number three, James begins to describe the absolute impossibility of getting control of the tongue outside of dealing with the heart.

You see, these people had a heart problem and they were believers. He wasn't writing to sinners, he was writing to believers. But they had a heart problem.

Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths that they may obey us and we turn about their whole body. Behold, also the ships, which though they be so great, are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor willeth or listeth. The word listeth there means willeth.

Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth. In other words, what James is saying is, it just takes a little spark, but what great fire can result from just a little spark.

And James is saying likewise the tongue. It's just a little member of the body, but oh, when it's unruly, just a little spark from the tongue and it can create a great damage. Now, how many know the tongue can do a lot of damage? Listen, we've been hurt more by words than we have physical things, haven't we? I'd rather have a broken arm than a broken heart, because I can live with a broken arm, but the Bible says it's almost impossible for a man or a woman to live with a broken heart.

You know it's true. See? Now you see why the Holy Spirit is saying to us, I want to get an inroad in your life. I want to get to the depths of the throne.

Now you see why. Because God knows he can pour out his blessing week after week, but unless he gets into us, we remain the same. When we go home and the same habits and the same patterns ensnare us, don't they? Sure.

Okay, let's go on. And the tongue is a fire, listen to this, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, listen to this, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell.

So the tongue is set on fire by the fires of hell itself. 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. But the tongue can no man tame.

It is unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Boy, James really had a revelation of the tongue, didn't he? If we could just see the tongue as James did. Now remember, he's not talking about this thing.

That's not what he's talking about. Just like when the Lord says he wants your heart, he doesn't want to take your heart out of your body. The tongue represents, listen, out of the heart the mouth speaks.

The tongue represents the heart. That's what James is saying. The heart.

Didn't Jesus said the heart is full of wickedness, fornication, adultery, uncleanness? See? Full of deadly poison. Verse 9. Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing.

My brethren, these things ought not to be. Doth the fountain send forth the same place, sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either of fine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. So basically, James is exhorting the believers here to understand one thing.

The heart is the issue. And only as the believer, you and I, allow the Holy Spirit to gain entrance into our heart and to establish the reign of Christ. Only then will you find your words will be words of love and edifying.

That's it. Only then. Let's close by reading verses 13 through 18.

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation or a good way of life his works with meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envying and strife, where? In your hearts. Now see, James is getting to the issue.

Listen, I want to assure you one thing. If it's here, it's going to eventually come out here. It might take a while, but it will come out.

So that's what Paul's saying, or James is saying. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish.

How many have known the wisdom that can operate in you that's devilish? This kind of wisdom can hurt a person, can it? You play with their emotions, you threaten them, you intimidate them. That's envy, there's strife, there's bitterness, festering inside. Oh beloved, the Lord Jesus is so pure, that's so far from Him.

He wants to wash us from these things so we can be clean. Now I like verse 17. Well, verse 16.

For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

So I know it's getting late, it's 20 to 12, 20 to 1. Wish it was 20 to 12. Beloved, listen. Just remember this.

Remember this simple illustration. The tongue and the deeds of the body, what you do, will never be brought under control by your power. You can willpower it, you can positive confession it all you want, but it'll never happen.

There's only one way for your words and your body to be brought into control, and that is, Jesus must have your heart every day. Paul said, I die once a month. You like that, Barb? Paul said, I die annually.

The first of the year I just say, alright Lord, take it, it's yours, and then, no, he said, I die daily. In other words, every day I say, Lord, here's my heart. Establish more of the throne of Jesus and take more of self out of me.

How many want to follow on to know the Lord in this way, and not just camp in the blessing? Although I don't want him to take his blessing, but I don't want to camp there. I want to know him. I want to be filled with him.

I want to be changed. I want Jesus to live his life in me, and I want my life to hang on the cross with his. Now, only he can do it, and he will do it, and he's just asking you one thing.

Will you? Will you just let him? By saying, Lord, here am I. Have mercy. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your love and your mercy.

Thank you, Lord, for the working of the Holy Spirit. We pray, Lord, that you would indeed search each one out this morning. Bring us all to the place where we become willing to say, Lord, do the deeper work in me.

Gain control of my inner kingdoms that you may sit as king, and thereby control my words and my actions. I'm here, Lord. Take me.

I'm yours. Let's sing that song. What? 358.

Go ahead. You could just sing it, and we'll just let the Holy Spirit work. If you have to go, go ahead.

If you have a love offering, right here's the basket. If you want to come to the altar, come. If you want to sing, sing.

We'll just let you at liberty now. Children, we want you to stay seated and quiet, and not run around. 358.

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