



Tongues

Little Church Members

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A Lesson from
James to the
Churches

Tongues

Nothing saddens the heart more than to hear of local churches divided, broken and destroyed by the Devil; especially in this day when good churches need 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. He is not so much trying to destroy it from without as he is from within.

One of the greatest threats to the unity and harmony of the church today is a natural phenomenon called “tongues.”

I am not talking of the tongues in Acts chapter two, but rather the tongues in James chapter three. Nor am I as concerned today with tongues “of fire” as with tongues “on fire.” * (see note). Many more churches are destroyed by the tongue “on fire” than the tongue “of 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 in its proper place. It is a real blessing when it is controlled in 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 become a tragedy. Whole forests have gone up in smoke. 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. Slander can set

a whole village or town ablaze in a short time. Vicious propaganda can turn a nation into a furnace of hatred. One need only look at the beginning of World War II. Before the first bullet was fired, hateful words were fanned into an inferno.

Another type of rage is the result of the truth being twisted. this rage has left countless victims in its wake. the tongue is a fire. Who has not felt the heat of its 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 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. 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 cause 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 the most destructive force available to us. How careful we must be to insure against tragedy. Just as a house or a whole city could go up in flames in a matter of minutes, so a man’s life worked can be destroyed in minutes by a careless act, or word. The tongue “on fire” has left the reputation of many a man or woman in rubble. Its damage is often total. Being sorry will not restore a building from a pile of ashes, more will it retrieve a destructive word or rebuild a broken name.

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 fire when out of control. We will also agree that the tongue can leave a Bible-believing church in a pile of ashes if care is not taken to prevent such a tragedy. What can we do? First know how fires are started, then how they are stopped.

There are three ways a fire can be started;

- 1) By carelessness. Many homes have been destroyed and lives have been lost to fire caused by careless people.
- 2) By accident. Through no real neglect, an appliance has been known to catch fire.

3) By intent. this intentional fire is called arson.

ARSON

The arsonist is a work 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 and innocently in the crowd to watch the holocaust.

If you saw someone about to set your church building on fire, you would be outraged. You would call the police. You would apprehend the culprit and see to it that he was dealt with by the full weight of the law. But what about spiritual arson?

The spiritual arsonist goes about with the gasoline of gossip and the filthy rags of rumor and slander. He would leave the church in ashes if left to do his dirty deed. We need to be as alarmed by the spiritual arsonist as we are about the physical arsonist, for he who sets the torch to the church of God is more guilty that he burns a city.

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 in the church with a hand cupped over his mouth to reveal a "secret" recognize him for what he is, 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, yea, even a twig upon the fire.

Another arsonist's rag is complaining. We are told in Numbers 11:1 that complaining displeases the Lord. God is never pleased to hear us complain. Numbers 14:27 tells us that it was for their complaining that the Israelites fell in the wilder-

ness. First Corinthians 10:10 tells us that, for this they were destroyed. In Numbers Chapter 12, 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 flame and destroy. For this reason, Paul admonishes us to do all things without murmuring and disputings. If someone comes to you complaining about something in the church, recognize him for what he is, a spiritual arsonist. Flee him, lest you be consumed in the conflagration he would cause.

Another trick of the spiritual arsonist is flattery. Flattery is one of the most subtle of the Devil's devices. If gossip is cotton, then flattery is silk. Both rags burn as well in the fire. Psalm 5:9 speaks of flattery as an "open grave." Oh, how many have fallen headlong into its opening! In Psalm 12:1-3 we see the end of the flatterer. His lips shall be cut off. God hates flattery as the very fire of Hell itself. Proverbs 29:5 says "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet."

HOW TO STOP IT

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 shut. I have never heard of someone criticizing another while his or her mouth was shut.

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 I bite my tongue before I bite another.

2. If you do not want to start a fire, then don't carry wood or oily rags around with you. Dislike or dissatisfaction must be

dealt with properly or it will burst into flames at the first provocation.

There was a pile of old rags and trash smoldering in a closet that started by spontaneous combustion. When the janitor came along and opened the door, the flames shot up into his face as the air that rushed in fed the flames. So too, in many a hear, there are 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, lest you be burned or burn another.

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 your pastor, Sunday School teacher, the church program, or any of a million things one can complain about, don't say "yes, I thought the same thing," or "I noticed that also." If you respond that way, you are guilty of being a spiritual arsonist.

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

3. Sound the 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 criticism, tell that person that he or she is sinning. 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. I 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 had do not something, he should go to him first. Usually one "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 of discontent, or concern is already burning in the others.

Even if the originator of this fire is satisfied after going to the offending party, there is no guarantee that those who "shared" the hurt will be able to extinguish the fire that has begun to burn in their own hearts, 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 confront this person with a living 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 Elders or the Deacons. Of course, the last recourse it 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. A bullet or a knife in the heart is a more charitable weapon than a word ill spoken.

Oh 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" that by "tongues of fire." *

Lord, we pray that our speech would always be seasoned with salt and that we would never be guilty of anything but building up with our conversation. Make us aware of the dangerous potential for destruction that is in the tongue; and may we al-

low you to control and approve our every word. Amen.

* The words “tongues of fire” are really a misnomer and are taken from Matthew 3 where it is actual speaking of the fires of God’s judgment.