



## A Systematic Expository Study on the General Epistle of JAMES

### **Study 11: A LITTLE MEMBER WITH GREAT POTENTIALS** **James 3:3-6**

A little poison, a little pin swallowed, a little tumour in the brain, a little fire in a dry bush all have great potentials to destroy. A little whisper or gossip, a little seed of discord sown in a family, a little slander, a little hatred, a little lie or deception, like a little fire can destroy precious lives. The whisperer and the double-tongued destroy the peace and happiness of the church and the family. Many a backbiting tongue has disquieted and discouraged others, overthrown houses, pulled down great men and strong cities, cast down virtuous women and deprived children of necessary care and support. And whosoever listens to a little slander, a little lie, a little negative talk cannot find rest, cannot dwell quietly, neither can he have a friend on whom he may rely. The stroke of the whip makes marks in the flesh; but the stroke of the tongue makes marks in the soul and breaks bones.

Remember that your tongue is constantly in a wet and slippery place, so you must be careful that it does not slip. This little tongue can be dangerous - even deadly and destructive! No wonder God put the tongue in a cage (behind the teeth) and walled it around (with the mouth). Many have fallen by the edge of the sword but many more have fallen by the tongue! The tongue - a little member, a little fire, a world of iniquity!

#### **A DIRECTING FORCE**

James 3:3,4; Psalm 32:9; Isaiah 37:29; James 1:26; Psalm 39:1; Acts 27:14-18,22-25; Matthew 12:34-37; 1 Corinthians 5:7.

James uses two illustrations of small things that play significant roles. "**Bits in horses' mouths**" and "**a very small helm**". The size of the instrument is no true measure of its significance. Some very small things can produce some very significant results. So it is with our tongue. The tongue is physically small but it has great potentials for construction or destruction.

A bit is a very small metal put in the mouth of the horse to control the horse. To control its whole body, its mouth is put under control. If we can control the tongue, we can control the whole body, but if the tongue is uncontrolled, the whole life is set on the wrong way.

A rudder is very small in comparison with the size of a ship; and yet, by exerting pressure on that little rudder, the steerman can direct the course of the ship. The tongue also is small, yet it can direct the whole course of a man's life. The tongue expresses the condition of the heart and the mind. When Christ fully controls the heart and the mind, thereby having His control on every word we speak, life will be safe, holy and happy. When our hearts and lives are fully submitted to Christ, He teaches us to know when silence is more spiritual and profitable than speech and when we have to speak, He instructs and guides us on the wise use of speech. The direction of our lives will be dictated by our tongues; and our destiny (the final destination after our pilgrimage) will be determined by our mouth.

#### **A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE**

James 3:5,6; Proverbs 18:7,21; Psalm 83:14; Isaiah 9:18; Proverbs 16:27; 26:18-21

The damage the tongue can cause is like that caused by a forest fire. A forest fire is wide-ranging; once the forest is set on fire, the flames spread like a wave which cannot be stopped. The tongue can damage at a distance. A careless word dropped at one end of the city can reach the other end, bringing grief and hurt. The tongue is as dangerous as the fire. If someone drops a malicious word or repeats a scandalous and untrue story about a neighbour or fellow christian, it can cause much harm hundreds of miles away.

A forest fire is also uncontrollable. So also, no man can control the damage of the tongue. A rumour, an idle, malignant story destroys so easily, so quickly. Let everyone, before speaking, remember that once a word is spoken, it is gone from his control and he will account for it in the day of judgment.

**"The tongue is ... a world of iniquity"**, a world of evil. There is no evil done in the world which cannot be perpetrated and promoted by the tongue. And the tongue of sinful, worldly people even makes evil attractive! By the tongue men can make evil things look good; by the tongue men can excuse and justify their wicked ways; by the tongue men can persuade others and lead them into gross sins. The uncontrolled tongue is full of wickedness and poisons every part of life. It can turn your whole life into a blazing flame of destruction and disaster.

## THE DECIDING FACTOR

*James 3:2,6; 1:26; 4:11; Matthew 12:36,37; Jude 15,16, Proverbs 13:3*

A man's heart is a storehouse and the tongue reveals what is stored there. A heart transformed by the grace and power of God will be known through the tongue touched by divine power and grace. We can easily know the spiritual state of a man by the kind of tongue he has. Your final, eternal destiny will be decided or determined by your tongue! **"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"** (Matthew 12:37). **"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; ... it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature: and it is set on fire of hell"** (James 3:6). Heaven or hell at the end of life will be determined for each one on the basis of whether you have grace or are void of grace - whether your life and words are gracious or graceless.

The tongue is the deciding factor! Many things reveal God's grace and His transforming power in our lives. His love through us, the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, Christlike character and christian conduct, obedience to God's Word and submission to His will. Yet nothing reveals our spiritual state and condition quicker or more readily than our tongue. Your tongue, your speech truly reveals who you are. Where will you spend eternity? Heaven or hell? What will your life be on earth? Happy or sorrowful? What will your value be in the Church? Will you be valuable or valueless? Useful or useless, profitable or unprofitable? Your tongue is the determining factor. In time and in eternity, your tongue plays a significant role in your temporal or eternal happiness and fulfilment.

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