

KEEP THY TONGUE FROM EVIL.

– *JUNE 6. – JAMES 3:1-13. –*

*"Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."
– Psa. 34:13.*

BE NOT many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment" (Revised Version). Thus the Apostle indicates that what he has to say concerning the great influence of the tongue is directed largely to those amongst believers who attempt to be teachers; who have a greater responsibility than if they were not teachers. It is not his wish to deter those who have ability, a gift in this direction, but rather to caution all as to the responsibility of the position they thus take. If they possess an eloquent tongue it may be a channel for a great blessing, swaying large numbers to the Lord, the truth and the way of righteousness; or, on the other hand, if contaminated with error, the tongue can do almost untellable harm – injury to faith, to morals, to good works. It is indeed true, that whoever exercises the gift of teaching lays himself open to increased responsibility in the sight of God and men. – See Matt. 5:19; Rom. 2:20,21; 1 Pet. 5:3; Titus 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:1.

The warning in this lesson is not against the tongue itself, but against the power which we exercise upon others by the use of our tongues. Probably every person of experience will fully agree with the statement that the tongue is potent in its influence beyond any other member of the body, for either good or evil. Experience teaches also that with the vast majority it is easier to control any other organ than the tongue. So skilful a servant is it that every ambition and passion and inclination of the fallen nature seeks to use it as a servant or channel for evil. It requires, therefore, on the part of the Christian, increased vigilance, wisdom and care so to govern this member of his body and bring it into subjection to the new mind in Christ, that it shall be, not a hindrance to himself or to others, but, on the contrary, a help

in the narrow way. As the bit in the horse's mouth will move and control his strength, and as the small rudder to a vessel will direct or change its course, so the tongue and the pen, its representative, may influence and turn about large numbers of people, for good or ill. How important, therefore, is the tongue, and how much more frequently do we find it employed as an agency for evil than as an agency for good, to pull down the faith rather than to build up the faith, to implant seeds of discord and discontent rather than those which will produce righteousness and peace! While this is specially true in the worldly, it is true to a considerable extent amongst God's people; and each should remember that to some extent he is a teacher, and day by day is either forwarding or hindering the cause of truth, righteousness and peace.

In the unregenerate world the tongue is indeed a "fire" causing no end of burning of wrath, envy, hatred, strife and everything that defileth the entire body, stimulating all the fallen passions and desires. No wonder the apostle declares figuratively that the tongue itself seems to be set on fire of gehenna – the second death. Its burning not only tends to bring its master but others to destruction.

In the statement, "Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made in the likeness of God," we should not understand the writer to refer to himself and to the Church as using their tongues for such unholy purposes, but as speaking for the whole world, some use the tongue to praise God and some use it to blaspheme his holy name and to curse their fellow creatures. It is a willing servant in whatever direction it is guided; and hence the importance of having so important a servant and member rightly guided. Apparently, however, there were some in the Church who out of the same **[R2157 : page 156]** mouth rendered thanks to God and curses to fellow creatures – perhaps not often curses in the ordinary acceptation of the term, but curses in the sense of injurious words, which would lead to a baneful or cursed or evil condition; for every false teaching is a curse to those who receive it. In this sense of the word at least, many out of the same mouth send forth both good and

evil influences. This is a wrong condition, and hence the importance of the warning, "My brethren, be not many teachers." Whoever would be a fountain from which would go forth the divine Word, carrying blessing and refreshment and strength, should see to it that bitter waters, false doctrines that would cause a curse, an injury – dishonoring God and perverting his Word – should not find in them a channel of utterance.

In the choice of leaders for meetings the "tongue" qualification, as here laid down should not be overlooked. The *fiery tongued* should not be chosen, but the meeker, the moderate, who "bridle" their tongues and endeavor carefully to "speak as the oracles of God" only. Such tongues *constrain*, while others more frequently wound and repel. The Word of the Lord is quick and powerful and *sharp* and cuts "to the heart" without bitter and acrimonious and uncharitable human expletives to enforce it. Hence the divine instruction that we "speak the truth in love."

The lesson closes with an exhortation to those who have the qualifications of teachers in the Church (wisdom and knowledge) to manifest themselves not merely by words and teachings, but also by godly lives and good works in meekness of wisdom.

While this lesson is pointed specially toward "teachers," it should be regarded by all. It is an old and true saying that "Kind words can never die," and it would be equally true to say, "Unkind words never die." Indeed, the latter live much the longer in a majority of cases – in worldly hearts especially. Let us each and all redouble our energy in subjugating our tongues, that they may always bless and "minister grace to the hearers." – Read Eph. 4:29.
