

# Studies in James

## Lesson 11

### Taming the Wild Beast of the Body

#### INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the third chapter of his letter, James confronts one of the most common problems faced by everyone, including the Christian – controlling our tongues.
  - A. Taming this "Wild Beast of the Body" presents a number of problems, but it IS possible to keep this beast from being unleashed with such fury that it destroys everyone around it.
    1. When we turn to the third chapter of James, we find some of the most insightful teaching on the TONGUE found anywhere in Scripture.
  - B. To set the stage for James 3, let's first look at a familiar event in the life of Jesus recorded in the **15th chapter of Matthew**.
    1. The DISCIPLES of Jesus were being criticized by the PHARISEES for NOT following the "tradition of the elders" in ceremonially washing their hands before eating.

- a. The Pharisees believed that failing to wash ones hands in a CEREMONIAL way, allowed DEMONIC INFLUENCES to invade that person's body.
  - b. Therefore, over the course of many years, perhaps decades, the Pharisees had devised a ceremony in which the hands were washed in a SPECIAL way – not so much to clean the hands of DIRT, but to cleanse the hands of unseen, unclean, evil FORCES.
  - d. Keep in mind, the Law of Moses NEVER taught this!
2. Therefore, Jesus branded these "tradition of the elders" as "vain worship" (empty, meaningless worship).
  3. FURTHERMORE, He said they made VOID the Law of God by their traditions.
    - a. They did this THREE ways:
      - (1). FIRST, they were binding a practice that God NEVER bound – AND looked down on those who didn't keep the practice.
      - (2). SECOND, they were elevating their tradition to be EQUAL (if not SUPERIOR to) the Law of God given to Moses.
      - (3). And THIRD, they were saying that if there was a CONFLICT OF DUTY between the Law of God (such as taking care of your parents), and their traditions (such as

mandatory contributions to the Temple fund), they could be RELEASED from keeping the Law IF they kept the tradition.

4. Finally, Jesus told the multitude: *"Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man... For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."* **(Matthew 15:10-11; 19-20)**
  - a. The REASON Jesus said this is simply because the things that proceed out of the MOUTH and defile a man ORIGINATE in the HEART.
  - b. In other words, Jesus taught that the HEART and the TONGUE are DIRECTLY associated.
    - (1). We reveal to others the condition of our HEART by the very words we SPEAK.
    - (2). In other words, the tongue reveals the CONTENTS of the heart.

III. Why is it then that we have SO MUCH DIFFICULTY controlling our tongues?

- A. The DIFFICULTY is simply because we're not willing to identify the ROOT of the problem.
  - 1. It's NOT a TONGUE problem – It's a HEART problem! Solve the HEART problem, then you'll take care of the TONGUE problem.
    - a. Solve the HEART problem of NOT loving your brother as you should, then you'll take care of the TONGUE problem of speaking evil (or talking) about them in a destructive, negative way.
    - b. Solve the HEART problem of lusting after sexual sins, then you'll take care of the TONGUE problem of telling suggestive jokes or using enticing speech.
    - c. Solve the HEART problem of deception, deceit and pride, and you'll take care of the TONGUE problem of lying.

**BODY:**

- I. With all THIS in mind, let's NOW turn our attention back to JAMES' teaching on the tongue.
  - A. James begins by giving us THREE ILLUSTRATIONS that show what the tongue is REALLY like.
    - 1. First, James says the tongue is like a horses bridle and bit: **James 3:3** – *Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.*

- a. The bridle is an apparatus that contains a metal bit.
  - b. Once the bit is placed in the horse's mouth it can control the horse's every movement.
  - c. Even though the RIDER is far WEAKER than the HORSE, he can exercise control over the horse with the bit and bridle.
2. Second, James says the tongue is like the rudder of a ship: **James 3:4** – *Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.*
- a. The rudder is even SMALLER in PROPORTION to the SHIP than the BRIDLE was to the HORSE.
  - b. The ship's rudder is connected to the helm, and by the simple turn of the wheel, the rudder can move a massive ship in ANY direction.
  - c. Even though the HELMSMAN is FAR WEAKER than the SHIP, he can exercise control over a ship with a simple turn of the rudder.
3. And third, James warns that the tongue is also like a spark of fire: **James 3:5** – *See how great a forest a little fire kindles!*
- a. The proportional difference in THIS illustration is even MORE dramatic than the first two.

- b. A SPARK, even though it might be visible to the human eye, can erupt into a flame and eventually lead to an IMMENSE forest fire, consuming MILLIONS of acres and perhaps HUNDREDS of lives.
4. So, what point is James trying to make with these illustrations?
- a. James is ESSENTIALLY saying, even though the tongue seems INSIGNIFICANT because of its SIZE, it's POTENTIAL to influence and destroy is FAR reaching.
    - (1). It has the power to sway the opinions of thousands and destroy the lives of millions.
      - (a). Imagine, if the Adolph Hitler had been born WITHOUT the ability to speak. World War II might never have happened, nor would more than 6 million Jews have died in German concentration camps.
    - b. NEVER under-estimate the destructive power of the tongue.
- B. In the verses that follow, James presents THREE WORD PICTURES to portray what the tongue is REALLY like.
- 1. In the FIRST word picture, James portrays the tongue as a FIRE.
    - a. **James 3:6** – *the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

- b. In THIS word picture, James uses the term FIRE to represent the sum total of INIQUITY.
  - (1). James knows it is virtually IMPOSSIBLE for a person to seethe with anger or bitterness without EVENTUALLY expressing that anger with an outburst of the tongue.
  - (2). LIKEWISE, it is practically impossible for a person to burn with lust or desire without EVENTUALLY expressing that lust or desire with the seductive talk of the tongue.
  - (3). And, it is virtually IMPOSSIBLE for a person to have an uncontrollable craving for power and self-glorification without EVENTUALLY expressing those desires with scheming plots, intrigue and lies of the tongue.
  
- b. FURTHERMORE, James adds that the tongue is, "set on fire by hell."
  - (1). The word "hell" used here is NOT referring to Hades, but to Gehenna – which in James' day was the name for the garbage dump into which the city's filth was thrown.
    - (a). This is the same word Jesus used to describe the fate of the unbeliever – the place where Satan dwells.

(2). And so, James is saying that all the VILENESS and FILTH OF HELL can spew forth from our mouth – by the uncontrolled tongue.

2. In the SECOND word picture, James portrays the tongue as an untamed beast.

a. **James 3:7-8** – *For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue.*

b. We might be successful in taming the nature of SOME wild beasts – but not ALL.

(1). Just when we THINK they're under the complete control of the trainer, their wild nature is suddenly unleashed – sometimes with terribly frightening consequences.

(2). Ask Roy Horn of Siegfried and Roy, who was nearly mauled to death by a 7-year old, 600 pound white tiger he had trained from a cub.

c. James says our tongue is just like those wild beasts that can NEVER be tamed – our tongue will NEVER be pacified and domesticated.

(1). Just when we THINK we've got our tongue under complete control, it's untamed, wild nature is suddenly



unleashed – SOMETIMES with TERRIBLE  
consequences.

- d. The bottom line is that the tongue can NEVER be tamed – maybe CAGED and CONTROLLED to SOME extent, but NEVER trusted without restraint.
3. And in the THIRD word picture James compares the tongue to a deadly poison.
- a. **James 3:8** – *It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*
  - b. Behind our teeth lies a LETHAL weapon – a slow acting, but VERY deadly poison.
  - c. The thought being expressed by James is that this poison has no antidote. There is NOTHING that can stop its deadly power once it's released.
  - d. In other words, this deadly poison, for which there is no antidote, is released through the TONGUE – released through words we speak and remarks we make.
    - (1). And once it's RELEASED, it can NEVER be taken back.
    - (2). This poison will continue doing its work until it finally kills.
- C. Finally, in the remaining verses, James provides us with a very simple application of these truths.
1. FIRST, James says inconsistencies and opposites SHOULD not come from the same source.

- a. **James 3:9-10** – *With it [our tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.*
- b. James makes it perfectly clear what we should NEVER use our tongue to bless our God and Father ONE minute, and then turn around and curse men the NEXT.
  - (1). What James is describing here is the believer who is quick to praise GOD, and yet somehow has convinced himself that he is completely justified in cursing or speaking against someone for some wrong they've done.
- c. James goes on to explain WHY there is no justification for this kind of action.
  - (1). He says the PROBLEM is that the PERSON we curse, is made in the image of GOD whom we bless.
  - (2). In other words, we're CURSING a CREATION of GOD made in HIS image. Just who do we think we are to feel we are EVER justified in CURSING the work of God's hands?
- d. And yet, how many times have you raised your voice in worship singing, "Oh How I Love Jesus," and praying, "Father, forgive us our sins?"

- (1). THEN, turn right around and say, "You know, I just DESPISE that person. I can't STAND them," OR you refuse to truly FORGIVE them for something they MAY have done to us.
2. And, in the SECOND application of these principles, James says inconsistencies and opposites CANNOT come from the same source – NATURE is a classic example of this.
  - a. **James 3:11-12** – *Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.*
  - b. It's just TOTALLY CONTRARY TO NATURE for a spring to bring forth BOTH fresh water and bitter.
    - (1). It will ALWAYS be one or the other – but NEVER both at the same time.
  - c. NOR can a FIG tree produce OLIVES, any more than an GRAPEVINE can produce FIGS.
    - (1). The fig tree will ALWAYS produce figs, NEVER OLIVES, and the grapevine will ALWAYS produce grapes, never FIGS.
  - d. NOR, says James, can SALT WATER produce FRESH.

(1). No matter HOW LONG you leave salt water SETTING, it will STILL be salt water.

(a). It will NEVER become fresh water UNTIL the salt is completely REMOVED.

II. SO... What does James REALLY want us to understand about taming the wild beast of the body – our TONGUE?

A. FIRST, he wants us to understand that the tongue DEFILES.

1. Our tongue will defile us EVERY TIME, IF we allow it to have free reign.

a. It'll not ONLY ruin our relationship with GOD, but it can just as easily ruin our relationship with OTHERS.

b. While God will ALWAYS be willing to forgive us – because of His unlimited grace and mercy – OTHERS, unfortunately, may NEVER forgive us.

c. The damage we cause may be PERMANENT and IRREPARABLE.

B. SECOND, James wants us to understand that the tongue DEFIES.

1. Our tongue defies EVERY effort to be tamed.

a. While it can be caged and controlled to SOME extent, it can NEVER be trusted.

(1). We can NEVER turn our backs on it for a single moment.

(2). Because, as soon as we DO, it will leap on us with all the fury of a wild beast.

b. And I think it's important that we NOT ONLY remember this about our OWN tongue, but ALSO about the tongues of OTHERS.

(1). When THEY say something to US that cuts, and wounds us deeply – let's remember THEIR tongue is ALSO untamed.

(2). Their tongue is no better than ours.

C. And FINALLY, James wants us to understand that the tongue DISPLAYS.

1. Our tongue displays the content of our heart – the THOUGHTS of our heart.

a. If our HEART is filled with the love of God, our TONGUE will bring forth blessings – it will be a fountain of fresh water.

b. But if our heart is filled with anger and bitterness, lust and desire, selfishness and self-seeking ambition, our TONGUE will bring forth cursing, coarse talk, and evil speaking – it will be a fountain of bitter water.

## **CONCLUSION:**

I. What does YOUR tongue say about the thoughts of YOUR heart?

- A. By the way, this will be ONE instance where the tongue DOES NOT LIE – it will TRUTHFULLY reveal what lies within your heart.
  - 1. Because, whatever lies in our heart will be revealed by WHAT we say and by HOW we say it.
  - 2. So, what is your tongue saying about the content of your heart?
- B. Do you need to CHANGE the content of your heart?
  - 1. Do you need to get rid of all the worldly, selfish, self-centered, greedy desires that has been cluttering up your heart?
  - 2. There's only one way I know you can do that. You need to give your heart to the LORD and let HIM clean it up.
    - a. For SOME of you, this will mean giving the LORD your heart for the FIRST time in complete trust and obedience – coming to the LORD in faith, repenting of your past, confessing your faith in Him, and being baptized for the remission of your sins.
    - b. For OTHERS, this will mean giving your heart BACK to the Lord AGAIN – coming to Him in genuine repentance, and confessing to Him all the uncleanness that's been IN your heart.