

A LITTLE MEMBER

"Even so the tongue is a little member" (Jas. 3:5). The tongue is one of the smaller members of the human body and may seem to be quite insignificant. But all one needs to do is spend some time considering the various scriptures that deal with this "little member" and he will realize otherwise. First, we notice that the apostle James says of the tongue, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body" (3:1). He also says, "it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (v8). We can use it for "blessing" or "cursing." (v10) — either for good or for bad. Once a servant was sent by his master to buy the best piece of meat he could find. To the master's surprise he brought home a tongue. The master wondered what he would buy if he sent him for the worst piece of meat. Again, he brought home a tongue. When his master asked him why he brought home a tongue each time, his reply was, "When it is good it is the best, and when it is bad it is the worst." How true! The tongue is either good or its bad.

Upon one occasion Jesus taught His hearers, "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). In other words, one's salvation hinges on the use he makes of his tongue.

Wars have been started and lives have been lost because of the tongue. On the other hand great speeches have been made which have cheered hearts for generations. Silvery tongued orators have swayed the thinking of masses. Solomon proclaimed, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). The tongue is a powerful instrument for good or for evil.

It is important that one learns to control his tongue. Someone may be quick to cite James 3:8 to justify the misuse of his tongue, "But the tongue can no man tame..." But does James mean that we have no control over what we say, therefore, not accountable? David wrote, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me" (Psa. 39:1). Notice again, Peter says, "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile" (1 Pet. 3:10). And it was James himself who said, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (Jas. 1:26). So when James wrote, "the tongue can no man tame" he did not mean a person's tongue could not be controlled by the person himself, but that no other person could control his tongue. He uses two illustrations: "we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us." "Behold also the ships. . .are they turned about. . .whithersoever the governor listeth." The horse is controlled by someone beside itself and the ship is controlled by someone at the helm. What James 3:8 is teaching is that no one can control our tongues for us; we have to do it ourselves. And if we don't, our religion is vain. Job said, "Teach me and I will hold my tongue" (Job 6:24).

There are many sins that can be committed with an unbridled tongue. The following are some of those sins: Slander (Prov. 10:18); whispering (gossip) (Rom.1:29), foul language (Eph.4:29), lying (Rev.21 :8), cursing (Jas. 3:0,10), double tongue (1 Tim. 3:8), flattery (Prov. 26:28; Psa. 12:3). There are other sins that can be committed with the tongue, but space does not permit us to include them all. These are some of the more prevalent.

In order to keep from committing sins with the mouth, the tongue must be bridled. James says, "...Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 3:19,20).

The tongue, although it can get us into serious trouble with the Lord if it is misused, on the other hand, it can be a great blessing if we use it for the good of man and the glory of God. We can make up our mind like Job, who said, "My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit" (Job 27:4). Or like David who said, "My tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long" (Psa. 35:28). And the apostle Paul said, "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:7). We can use our mouths and our tongues to preach and teach the gospel of Christ to the salvation of precious souls. "...According as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor.4:13).

In conclusion, "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23). Let us keep in mind, Jesus said, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Our tongues are either good or bad.

Remember, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11).