

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Taming the Tongue James 3:1-12 Part Six

We have been examining the Epistle of James. The theme of this epistle is “Tests of Living Faith.” We are now considering the fifth test which we have called the “Speech test.” How can we know whether or not we have a living faith, a saving faith? We can know by the way we speak. We can know by what we say and by what we don’t say.

In developing this test James shares with us five different reasons why we should control our tongues. He gives us five different reasons why we should tame our tongues. We have considered 3 of the 5 different reasons. They are:

The tongue’s potential to bring judgment which we saw in **James 3:1**.

The tongue’s potential to effect the entire course of our lives which we saw in **James 3:2-4**.

The tongue’s potential to bring destruction which we saw in **James 3:5-6**. The uncontrolled tongue is an incredibly powerful tool of destruction and James compares it to the destructive power of fire and in the various destructive expressions of the tongue there is no more destructive expression than in evil reporting.

An evil report involves distorted facts, incomplete facts and false information. And it is given with impure motives. What we normally call gossip and slander would fall under this broader category which I have called evil reporting.

I would hope, because of the very destructive potential of evil reporting that we would purpose ourselves never to be involved with it in any way, whether that is in the birth of an evil report or it’s spread. In order to help us to accomplish this, several weeks ago we began to answer the question, “How can we avoid becoming involved in giving birth to evil reports?” It begins with three very simple guidelines:

First of all, always pause to reflect before speaking about another person. In **James 1:19** it says, “**This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.**” We are always to be slow about speaking but understanding the destructive power of evil reporting we need to be especially slow. We need to purpose to deliberately pause.

Secondly, while pausing we need to go to prayer. In **Matt. 26:41** it says Jesus told His disciples, “**Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.**” The flesh is weak and there is no area of our flesh more prone to temptation than the tongue. So let us prayerfully ponder our words especially those words which might reflect badly on another person.

And thirdly, when we pray we need to give priority to our own sinfulness. We need to give time to examine ourselves and confess any sin that we might find in our lives.

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Those who tend to be preoccupied with the short comings of others rather than their own shortcomings tend to be self-righteous people. Hopefully you remember the words of Jesus to His disciples in **Matt. 7:5**, “**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.**” Hopefully each of us have taken this admonition to heart.

After following these three very basic guidelines we are then prepared to ask ourselves three very basic questions to help us determine whether or not we should choose to share with another Christian the shortcomings of a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

The first question is: “Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share? We should not be going to another until we have done all that we can for a fellow believer whose shortcomings we are about to share.

If our Christian brother’s shortcomings involve willful sin, we have the responsibility to go to him and rebuke him according to **Matt.18:15-17**

If our Christian brother’s shortcomings involve an inability to extract himself from a sin that he wants to be set free from, we have the responsibility to come alongside of him in a spirit of gentleness to restore him according to **Gal. 6:1-5**

If our Christian brother’s shortcomings involve an unawareness of God’s biblical standards, we have the responsibility to teach him according to **Mt. 28:19** and to speak the truth in love according to **Eph. 4:15**

We should not seriously consider sharing a fellow believer’s shortcomings until we have acted upon what we know our personal responsibility to be toward them.

The second question that I gave you last week was: “Will the information that I am about to share serve some good purpose?” There will be times when we have done all that we can do to restore or to mature a sinning brother and feel as if more help is still needed. There will be times when we have done all that we possibly can do in acting responsibly toward a sinning brother or sister and yet the need for restoration or for maturing continues to persist. Certainly anyone who has a ministry mentality will understand exactly what I am sharing. And at those times you may see that there is a need to recruit some reinforcements.

I believe we see Paul doing exactly this when he appeals to the Philippian church to help him in ministering to Euodia and Syntyche in **Phil. 4:2-3**. But before we reach out for help we need to ask the question, “Will passing this information about a fellow believer’s shortcomings serve some good purpose? Will passing this information about another believers shortcomings help restore or mature this sinning brother? This is where we left off last week.

If you have acted responsibly in light of the perceived shortcoming, if you think that sharing this perceived shortcoming will in fact serve some good purpose, I believe that you are free to move forward. But with this blessing to move forward, I would like to give you a strong recommendation:

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When you go to share a perceived shortcoming, go to an individual who has been entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the person who needs help and humbly submit yourself to their counsel.

Why? We need to understand that, though we are personally responsible for getting involved in the restoration and maturing of the saints that the Lord has placed in our lives, we are not the only ones who bear some responsibility toward them. Listen to the words of **Heb. 13:17**, “**Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.**” Who has God given the responsibility to watch over our souls? The leaders of the church. And in this case, it would be the elders and of course those individuals that the elders have set apart to assist them in that ministry.

When we have exhausted our personal resources in ministering to a particular person and believe that we need help, we should go to those who have been formally set apart to oversee the spiritual life of that person. This is a right thing to do. This is a wise thing to do. Not only for the person you are seeking to restore or mature, but it provides you with a certain protection. Why do you need to be protected? Because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Why do I need to have the protection of going through the elders or those assisting the elders in ministry with my concerns rather than to my friends? Because we can be easily deceived about our motives.

A bitter heart can be easily deceived. A person with a bitter heart will find it very difficult to follow the guidelines or answer the questions that I have suggested honestly. Therefore it is imperative, when you think you are righteously reaching out for help, that you purpose to share any information about a perceived shortcoming with those who have been entrusted with their spiritual care. This is a matter of protection.

Several weeks ago I shared with you that over 20 years ago a woman in our church, through a series of events, came to believe that I was guilty of being unloving, manipulative, and unteachable. I believe that she became bitter toward me. And because of this she wanted others to know these things about me as well.

I do not believe it was likely, because of her personal bitterness, that any of the guidelines or questions that I have suggested would have helped her to see things differently than how she saw them. I believe that her ultimate purpose was not to serve me, but to hurt me. When an individual is blinded with bitterness they will find it very difficult to see themselves accurately. But I believe that the church would have been better protected, she would have been better protected, and I would have been better protected, if she had, early on in her Christian life purposed to go to the spiritual leaders of her church with these types of concerns and humbly submit herself to their counsel. In this case she would have come to my fellow elders. And I believe a lot of grief could have been avoided.

This is not what she did. Rather she went to her friends and shared her perspectives with them. And as a result of this choice on her part we experienced the truth of **Heb.12:15** which says that “**bitterness defiles many.**” Her bitterness not only blinded herself but also her friends and they took up her offense.

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When you reach out for ministry support and share a perceived shortcoming, I would strongly recommend that you go to an individual or individuals within our church who have been entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the person you perceive to be in need and humbly submit yourself to their counsel. Why would this be helpful? Though these suggested guidelines and questions will root out a lot of careless speech, and idle gossip, it will not necessarily protect us from a bitter heart, because a bitter heart can be easily deceived. Therefore going to spiritual overseers, rather than to personal friends, will provide a measure of protection if we are prepared to humble ourselves regarding their counsel. But it is not only the bitter heart that can be easily deceived.

A willful heart can be easily deceived. Look at **3 John 9**, **“I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”**

It seems like many churches from time to time have a member who insists on “being boss” and having their own way. And unfortunately this person can even be a church leader. Our Lord’s disciples argued on a number of occasions over which of them would be greatest in the kingdom. Jesus had to remind them that their model for ministry was not the Roman official who “lorded it over” people, but the Savior Himself who came as a humble servant.

Diotrephes had failed to grasp this important lesson. Instead of giving preeminence to Christ, he claimed it for himself. He had the final say-so about everything done in the church, and his decisions were determined by one thing: What will this do for Diotrephes?

Whenever a church has a resident dictator or someone who is self-willed, active in its membership, there are bound to be problems. When it comes to discerning what they should share about others, they will find it very difficult to apply the three guidelines that I have shared with you. They will also have problems with answering the two questions that I have shared with you. The reason is because, like the bitter person, they are blinded. The bitter person is blinded by their bitterness. And the willful person is blinded by their pride.

How blind can they become? Look at Diotrephes. He would not listen to the Apostle John. What does the verse say? **“I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”** Who wrote something to the church? The Apostle John. And who did not receive what he said? Diotrephes. That is amazing. How much Diotrephes could have learned from John! But he turned a deaf ear to this godly apostle of Christ. His prideful heart ultimately expressed itself in prideful words. His prideful heart ultimately expressed itself in slanderous words. Look at **v. 10** where we see the response of the Apostle, **“For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words”**

If a person is prideful, the guidelines and the questions that we have suggested can be helpful. They may serve to root out the problem. But it is not a guarantee. If a prideful heart is the driving force for the words that are going to be spoken, those in leadership will be in a better position to detect it and minister to the specific situation. Just as we see happening with the Apostle John in respect to Diotrephes.

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Hopefully you have been persuaded as to the wisdom of this particular recommendation and you might wonder how you should approach it if you ever needed reinforcements in ministering to someone in this fellowship.

If the person you are concerned with attends a growth group, approach their growth group leader for help in ministering to a struggling brother or sister in Christ. If they are not involved in a growth group then approach the leader of whatever ministry they may be involved with in the church. If you are unsure about what you should do, the ministry leader that you should approach or if you desire additional help, you can always come to the elders of the church. We will do what we can to come alongside of you

Now someone might say, “Dale I have been listening to what you have been saying and I don’t necessarily disagree with what you have said. But I am confused, you keep mentioning if we see a shortcoming in a brother’s or sister’s life, I need to ask these questions: Whether or not I have acted responsibly in light of the information I am about to share? Whether or not this information will serve some good purpose. But what about my unsaved neighbor, or friend or family member. Let me quickly answer this question. We are responsible to point out to our unsaved friends and family members that they are sinners and need a Savior. We have a responsibility to share the Gospel of Christ so that they may come to know Him personally. But we are not here to clean up their lives. We are here to fish fish and not clean up the fish pond (Matt. 28:19). Therefore, rather than purposing to clean up our neighbors language, we should be doing one specific thing. And that is seeking to lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

So once again, “What are the questions we need to ask when are are thinking about sharing a perceived shortcoming in the life of a fellow brother or sister in Christ? Have I acted responsibly in light of the information I am about to share? Will this information I am about to share serve some good purpose?

And now finally the third question that we would need to ask would be: Have I considered how to share this information in the most positive light?

There is a very well known biblical truth that I believe we are all familiar with. And it is called the “Golden Rule.” It is found in **Matt. 7:12**. What does it say? Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

If you seek to enlist the help of others in the restoration of a member of the body of Christ, No matter who they might be, speak as well as you can about that individual.

Isn’t that what we saw in **Phil. 4:2-3** **“I urge Euodia and I urge Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”** He did not say help these poor women who are just mean spirited, unforgiving, witches. If they could just get their eyes off their pettiness, they might be of some use to someone.

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CONCLUSION

The uncontrolled tongue is a fire. It is the very world of iniquity. It sets on fire the entire course of our lives and it is set on fire by hell itself.

In terms of the destructive power of the tongue, there is no greater illustration of it than the evil re[po]rt.

In light of this fact, we need as believers to purpose ourselves never to be involved with it in any way, whether that is in its birth or in its spread. How can we avoid becoming involved in giving birth to evil reports?

We first of all need to pause before speaking about another for the purpose of prayer. In our prayer we need to be examining our own lives and confessing our sins.

After having done this we are then and only then prepared to ask certain very important questions of ourselves before we feel the freedom to share any perceived weakness concerning another person. What are those questions?

Have I acted responsibly with the information that I am about to share?

Will this information I am about to share serve some good purpose? Hopefully remembering the strong recommendation that if you answer this question positively that you will go for help to the person who is actively ministering in the life of the person whom you are concerned about.

Have I considered how to share this information in the very best possible light?