

Here's How It Works V – The Tongue

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Romans 6:13

REVIEW

Themes in our text:

Reliance – fully resting on the Holy Spirit for guidance, enlightening, strengthening ...

Sincerity – having pure, unmixed, transparent honesty before the Lord

Attentiveness – being heedful, observant, watching with care for all God would have us to do

Obedience – doing as told

Thoroughness – carrying out this process completely

Love – “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (I John 5:3)

Our member:

Last time we looked at the *eyes*. Today let's consider the *tongue*, a significant topic for . . .

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” (Pro. 18:21)
So, the tongue is capable of *the greatest evil* and *the greatest good*; and there *will* be consequences.

So here's the command to us: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Eph. 4:29)

“Let” – so speech is in our power now. See: “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.” (Jam. 1:26)

“no” – a high standard!

“corrupt” – “rotten,” really. The word is used in the Bible to describe bad fruit and bad fish.

“edifying” – that which builds up. The process could be initially painful, but it produces growth.
See Acts 20:27 – “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”
Also: “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Prov. 27:5-6)

“minister grace” – see, again, the immense power of words. Grace!

Our text:

The most thorough description of the power of the tongue is found in James 3:1-12. Here we see:

1. The power of direction
2. The plague of defilement
3. The impossibility of domestication
4. The predicament of division
- and
5. The purity of devotion

I. The Power of Direction (:3-6a)

A. Comparisons:

1. Horses (can weigh up to a ton) with bits (that may weigh a pound)
2. Ships (can weigh a half million tons) with rudders (similarly small)
3. Forest fires (can destroy millions of acres) with matches (size of a toothpick)

B. Oh, what massive influence a little tongue can have!

1. It can lead a man's whole body – “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin.” (Ecc. 5:6)
See Delilah's effect on Samson (Judg. 16:15-16). Compare Prov. 7:21ff. Also: “A soft tongue breaketh the bone” (Prov. 25:15)!!
2. So also large numbers of people can be moved (perhaps having no clarified thoughts of their own and looking for somebody to fill their heads with something, especially an unkind or envious take). See, for ex., Acts 13:50, 14:2, 17:5, 17:13, 21:27, where mobs are “stirred.”

II. The Plague of Defilement (:6b)

A. “A world of iniquity”

1. “An organism containing all evil essence from which it permeates the entire man.” (Vincent)
2. “All kinds of evil that are in the world are exhibited there in miniature; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth.” (Barnes)
3. Like a black hole of evil.
4. Barnes again: “And what evil is there which may not be originated or fomented by the tongue? What else is there that might . . . be represented as a little world of iniquity? With all the good which it does, who can estimate the amount of evil which it causes? Who can measure the evils which arise from scandal, and slander, and profaneness, and perjury, and falsehood, and blasphemy, and obscenity, and the inculcation of error, by the tongue? Who can gauge the amount of broils, and contentions, and strifes, and wars, and suspicions, and enmities, and alienations among friends and neighbors, which it produces? Who can number the evils produced by the “honeyed” words of the seducer; or by the tongue of the eloquent in the maintenance of error, and the defense of wrong? If all men were dumb, what a portion of the crimes of the world would soon cease! If all men would speak only that which ought to be spoken, what a change would come over the face of human affairs!”

B. “It defileth the whole body.”

1. It makes dirty, tarnishes, soils, pollutes, taints, debauches . . . *everything*.
2. The idea is that the tongue “stains or pollutes the whole body. It occupies a position and relation so important in respect to every part of our moral frame, that there is no portion which is not affected by it. There is nothing else pertaining to us as moral and intellectual beings which exerts such an influence over ourselves as the tongue.” (commentator)

C. “It setteth on fire the course of nature.”

1. Literally, the “wheel” of [sin] nature. The tongue gets the whole thing going, like a burning runaway vehicle going down hill.

D. “And it is set on fire of hell.”

1. That is, by the devil. He holds the torch and dwells in a place where fire continually burns. This is a picture of Satan's influence over the speech of human beings.
2. Cf. “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.” (Prov. 16:27)
3. See Peter, Matt. 16:22-23.

III. The imPossibility of Domestication (:7-8)

A. “... has been tamed by man.”

1. Dominated
2. The verb appears one other time, Mark 5:4, for the demoniac of the Gadarenes.
3. Man has found a way to exercise a measure of control over all other living things.

B. “But the tongue can no man tame.”

1. So, it is wilder, less responsive to authority, than all wild animals.
2. The tongue is an evil that ultimately will not be restrained.

C. “full of deadly poison”

1. Compare Ps. 140:1-3.
2. Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
All corners of the world: kings, queens, and states,
Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave
This viperous slander enters. – *Shakespeare*

IV. The Predicament of Division (:9-12)

A. Descriptions by commentators

1. Such contradiction of good and evil speech is called an absurdity, monstrous, shameful, disgraceful, scandalous, and – watch for it – *unnatural*, as the sensual crimes in Romans 1:26.

B. Compare: “But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?” (Ps. 50:16)

V. The Purity of Devotion

A. Oh, that this “fountain” would only yield fresh water!!!

1. Is that our burden?
2. Can we say along with the psalmist, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle.” (Ps. 39:1)

B. Then we must yield this member to be used as an instrument of righteousness unto God.

C. We must pray with David:

1. “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” (Ps. 141:3)
2. “Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.” (Ps. 71:8)

DISCUSSION

1. Comment on Eph. 4:29. Provide illustrations of edifying speech that ministered grace in your life. Can you list times when something said in a sermon or something written profoundly impacted you?
2. Can you provide examples in Bible history of the tongue being a “world of iniquity”?
3. Think of, write down, and then speak at least 10 positive comments that can be made.