

## The First Lesson, pt. 2

### January 23, 2007

What would you say is the most dangerous weapon in the world? Any opinions? How about a razor-edged knife? As dangerous as it is I don't think it's the most dangerous.

How about a gun? There's no doubt that a gun is a dangerous weapon. But I don't think it's the most dangerous either.

How about this? For the sheer amount of damage that it causes there isn't a more dangerous weapon in the world than a tongue.

## The World's Most Dangerous Weapon

**James 3:2a, 6a, 8b-9a**

<sup>2a</sup> We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is perfect...

<sup>6a</sup> The tongue is a fire, a world of evil...corrupting the whole person...

<sup>8b</sup> It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

<sup>9a</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men...

You have, no doubt, upon the occasion of a visit to your family physician been asked to stick out your tongue. Apparently there's a lot he or she can tell about us just by looking at our tongues. Imagine if we had to submit to a thorough examination of our tongues as we walked through the door this morning to check out everything we'd said in the past week... Open wide. Now stick out your tongue and say, "Ahhh." My you've been busy this week...

It's a biblical axiom; many of the things we say...we just shouldn't say. We might think that it really doesn't matter all that much. But we'd be wrong. It does matter. It matters a lot.

- Far more dangerous than guns and knives is talk.
- Far more destructive than bullets or blades are words.
- Far more deadly than this gun I have in my hand and this knife I have in the other is the tongue I have in my mouth.

I haven't shot anyone in a long time. I've wanted to, but I've managed to keep that under control. And I can't remember the last time I slashed anybody. If we meet in a dark alley you don't have a single reason to be afraid. I'm not going to shoot you, stab you or steal from you. But I'm not harmless and I'm not unarmed...

- I've never shot anyone with a gun, but I've shot 'em with my words.
- I've never stabbed anyone with a knife either, but I've stabbed people in the back with some of the things I've said about them.
- And I've never stolen anything from anyone...except for the reputations that I've stolen by the things I've said or implied.

Guns and knives really aren't even a part of my arsenal. I don't need 'em. I can do all the damage my blackened heart desires simply by opening my mouth.

- Most of us are going to cause far less trouble for others with guns and knives than with our words.
- Most of the time we have far less to fear from the guns and knives of others than we do their words.

## DISCUSSION

1. Do you remember an occasion/occasions where the words of a friend, co-worker, business competitor, family member have caused you to suffer?
2. Do you remember an occasion/occasions when your words have done it to others?

## This Should Not Be...

### James 3:10b

This should not be.

When the Bible instructs us that “this should not be” (James 3:10), we should understand it to be a very broad statement regarding the various habits of speech that are common to most people, except, obviously, for those of us in this room...

If you and I will take this morning's lesson to heart it's going to have an immediate and lasting affect on our lives and on those whose lives we touch. It's going to enrich us and it's going to enrich everyone we know. That's a promise.

## Gossip Should Not Be

- Gossip, (raghan, Heb.) is saying something in a person's absence that we wouldn't say in their presence.
- It's purpose is simple—to make someone else look bad.
  - Most of us don't need to have it defined beyond that.
  - Let's just agree that we know what it is and we know how to do it.

### Proverbs 18:8

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Participating in gossip, either by listening or by speaking is like an hors d'oeuvre. It whets our appetite for more. Enough is never enough it seems. Maybe it's the sort of activity James had in mind when he wrote that our words *corrupt our entire life* (James 3:6).

## Slander Should Not Be

Slander (katalaleite, Gk.) is any form of speaking against someone else with the end result being a damaged reputation.

### **James 4:11-12**

Do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. <sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

- Slander assumes an authority that does not exist; the authority to pass judgment which action belongs solely to God.
  - God alone gave the law, and only he is qualified to judge those who are responsible to keep it.
  - “But you—who are you?” implies that when we speak unkindly about someone else we have usurped God’s authority.

### **Flattery Should Not Be**

- Flattery (eulogias, Gk.) is sort of an antonym of gossip.
- Where gossip is saying something in a person’s absence that we wouldn’t say in their presence, flattery is saying something in a person’s presence that we wouldn’t say in their absence.

### **Romans 16:18**

Such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

### **Jude 16**

These men...follow their own evil desires; they...flatter others for their own advantage.

God is not impressed when we try to impress others by the things we say to them when those things are designed for our own self-serving benefit.

- It’s the sales person who will say anything to get us to make a purchase.
- It’s the schmoozer who dazzles us with words in order to get our name on the dotted line.
- It’s the glad handing politician who only wants our vote.
- It’s any kind of disingenuous conversation in which we might engage where the purpose disregards the welfare of the other party for the sake of personal gain.

### **Carelessness Should Not Be**

### **Matthew 12:36-37**

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

- “Careless word” in verse 36, (argon hrēma, Gk.) describes the forming of an ill-advised opinion or a concept based on incomplete or inaccurate facts.
- “Words,” used twice in verse 37 (logon, Gk.) describes the communicating of that opinion to someone else.

There is reason to believe that Jesus intended this as a specific warning to the religious watchdogs of his day (Pharisees) as they summarily dismissed his teaching and recklessly attributed his ministry to the working of Satan. The warning here should be taken seriously by all of us to refrain from carelessly forming opinions about the life, ministry or worship of others and then passing along those opinions to others with our words.

## **Bragging Should Not Be**

### **James 4:16**

You boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup>Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

- Boasting (kauchasthe, Gk.) and bragging (en tais alazoneiais, Gk.) isolate the behavior of pretense.
- Pretending, by the things we say about ourselves, to be something other than what we actually are, which is proven by the things we do is a sin.

## **DISCUSSION**

1. Which of these five bad habits, gossip, slander, flattery, carelessness or bragging, do you think is the most destructive and why?
2. Which is the most difficult to avoid for you, and why?

## **You Can...If You Will...**

### **James 3:8a**

No man can tame the tongue.

### **ILLUSTRATION**

It's less than encouraging to learn that none of us can tame the tongue (James 3:8). Joel Gregory, former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas tells the story of his visit to England where in a long forgotten English churchyard on a windswept hillside he found an old slate gravestone inscribed with this barely readable inscription:

## Arabella Young

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay,  
Lies Arabella Young,  
Who, on the twenty-fourth of May,  
Began to hold her tongue.

As I said, not altogether encouraging to think that short of dying we're hopelessly bound to sin by our speech. That isn't to suggest it can't be done. All things are possible through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Let's make this commitment:

- We'll refuse to listen to gossip and we'll refuse to repeat it.
- We'll say nothing in anyone's absence that we wouldn't say in their presence and we'll say nothing in anyone's presence that we wouldn't say in their absence.
- We won't say anything unkind about anyone if it isn't true.
- We won't say anything unkind about anyone if it might not be true.
- We won't say anything unkind about anyone even if it is true.

## Lips & Slips

If your lips would keep from slips  
Five things observe with care;  
Of whom you speak, to whom you speak,  
And what and when and where.

You can make this change if you want to. Any Christian can. It's simply a matter of trust, dedication and commitment. I promise you this much; you'll live to regret it if you don't, and you'll never regret it if you do.