

THAT TERRIBLE TONGUE!

Joe Slater

Few things are opened by mistake more often than the mouth. Who among us cannot think of a dozen times we wish we had kept silent? James issues an ominous warning: “*If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless*” (James 1:16). We use bridles to control and restrain horses. How about controlling and restraining our tongues (speech)? Unless we do, James says our religion is useless.

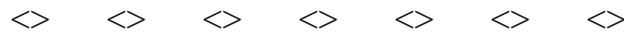
“But James, I’m a member of the Lord’s church!” [If you don’t control your mouth, your religion is useless.] “But James, I’ve been baptized, and I attend church services regularly!” [If you don’t control your mouth, your religion is useless.] “But James, I’m a preacher / elder / deacon / teacher / etc.” [If you don’t control your mouth, your religion is useless.] Are we getting the point?

Words can hurt. Scripture uses numerous expressions to demonstrate this point. Solomon wrote, “*There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health*” (Proverbs 12:18). You need not physically assault someone to devastate them. Verbal brutality may leave its victims’ bodies unmarked, but their souls are cut to ribbons.

Of the wicked it is written, “*the poison of asps is under their lips*” (Romans 3:13). James refers to the tongue as “*an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*” (James 3:8). Snake venom can kill physically; even if the person survives, some adverse effects may be permanent. Likewise, poisonous words slay the spirit. Harsh remarks, vicious rumors, even the truth spoken rudely, may result in weakening or total loss of faith.

I have seen members of Christ’s body virtually driven away by ungodly rumor-mongering, not from the world, but from their own brothers and sisters in Christ! Someone may say, “They were wrong to let anything come between them and the Lord, no matter what!” True enough, but hear the words of Jesus: “*It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones*” (Luke 17:1, 2).

Perhaps you have heard that the tongue is slippery and hard to control, so God imprisoned it behind two sets of bars (the teeth and the lips). That illustration at least reminds us of our responsibility to control and restrain our speech. Unless we do, our religion is useless.



Worrying About What’s Next

I have a good friend who lives in Kentucky. He’s such a huge fan of UK basketball that he gets a bit too worked up while watching their games. Therefore, instead of watching their games live, he records them and busies himself with other things. Then when the game is over, he checks the final score. If UK won, he can then sit down and watch that game without any worry or stress. No matter how “nip and tuck” the game may be, he doesn’t worry because he knows how the game ends.

I believe there’s a lesson here for all Christians. Too many of us worry about what tomorrow holds. We fret about what will happen next. However, here’s my question: “Why should we worry about what happens next when we know what happens last?”

Life holds a lot of ups and downs, even for the Christian. But that is no reason to unduly worry and fret about tomorrow, for we know what happens in the end! We’ve read the end of the book, haven’t we? And the book records that in the end, we’re victorious ([Revelation 2:10](#))!

So, the next time you’re tempted to overly concern yourself with what will happen next, just remember that you know what will happen last!

--Steve Higginbotham (Knoxville, TN)

Ways I Deepen My Faith

(when I read Revelation)

I endure suffering more confidently (chapters 6-9).

When the going gets tough, what do you do? Sometimes it gets tough because we live in a fallen world of tornadoes, cancer, car wrecks, and floods. The effects of sin affect us all. Sometimes the going gets tough because we’re Christians. As Paul promised, “*Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12). When the going gets tough, what do you do?

Revelation 6-9 teaches me to sing. The going gets tough in these chapters—war, famine, murder, earthquakes, stars falling to earth, warrior locusts. The slain believers in chapter 6 ask God, “How long will this suffering last?” In tough times, we wonder if God has forgotten us.

Phillip Yancey tells the story of some Americans in a German prison camp in World War II who, unbeknownst to the guards, built a makeshift radio. One day news came over the radio that the German high command had surrendered, ending the war, but because of a communications breakdown, the German guards didn’t yet know. It wasn’t until four days later that the Americans awakened to discover the Germans had fled, leaving the gates unlocked. In the three interim days, those prisoners still suffered. They were still mocked and abused, but they were changed. They waved to the guards, laughed at the German shepherd dogs, told jokes over meals, and in the midst of their captivity, they sang, because they knew their salvation was sure and soon.

In Revelation 7, the oppressed believers get a news bulletin about the near future. The time is coming when they will stand before the throne. The Lamb will be their shepherd and lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Because their salvation is soon and sure, they can sing the song in 7:10, “*Salvation belongs to our God.*” So when my going gets tough, I too can sing. Heaven awaits and God has not forgotten me, so I can endure suffering more confidently.

--Matt Proctor (via *Christian Standard*)