

# POWER OF THE TONGUE!

- Paul Anderson

Job asked his so-called friends, *"How long will you torment me, and break me in pieces with words?" (Job 19:2).*

Words have launched wars. They have broken up countless marriages, separated life-long friends, split churches, and sent children down the lonely road of depression. But they have also healed cancer, prevented suicides, restored friendships, stopped wars from breaking out, and brought the emotionally imprisoned into liberty.

Solomon knew better: *"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov 12:18).* Words contain potential for good or evil. In fact, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." (Proverbs 18:21a).*

## **THE TONGUE HAS GREAT POTENTIAL FOR GOOD.**

*"If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs" (James 3:3,4).* James gives us two examples to show us that **small** can be significant.

**A BIT.** A broken and bridled stallion makes a beautiful sight, and a little bit goes a long way! The flick of the wrist by the master turns the mighty beast in an instant. His will has come under the control of his rider, and a ninety-pound girl can rule a great racehorse. James likewise says that a controlled tongue makes possible the direction of the whole body. If you want to obey your Master, start with the tongue. It's downhill from there.

**A RUDDER.** On a recent vacation, my wife Karen and I sat at one of our favorite restaurants along the San Pedro harbor and watched mega-oil freighters cut their way into quiet waters and dock. Amazing as it is, the direction of these huge ships is determined by a relatively small rudder, operated by one man's hand.

And similarly, the direction of our lives is determined by the funny little member in our mouth. It will take us down a path of destruction or it will deliver us: *"He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3).*

## **THE TONGUE ALSO HAS POTENTIAL FOR EVIL.**

*"So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:5-8).* Again, James gives us two examples.

**FIRE.** I watched the 1993 Southern California fire on TV. Our close friends, the Guldseths, watched it for real. It wiped out their guest house, tool shed, and several cars. One match can do great damage; so can one word.

Pyromaniacs can make a crime look like an accident. James removes any doubt about the origin of fires ignited by the tongue—the pit of hell. We may say that it started with a prayer request or a little criticism. James corrects us by saying that it was fueled by the fires that will rage for an eternity.

God sees all such blazes, started by a word of sarcasm, a fit of outrage, or a yearning for vengeance. They are much more than "just words". Remember--only you can prevent forest fires!

**POISON.** A quiet and controlled lady once put her troubled daughter in our church school. The girl lasted only a few weeks. As the principal explained why she was compelled to dismiss the child, the mom listened impatiently. When she decided that she had heard enough, she stomped out of the room, spilling poison and profanity along the way. Mrs. Cool morphed into a serpent in a few seconds.

A snake exists in South America that is called the Two-Step. If you're bitten by one - two steps and you're dead! The poison works about that fast, paralyzing the nervous system. A deadly tongue poisons reputations, kills futures, and destroys relationships.

So the challenge comes to do what I am already told I can't - tame my tongue. But Jesus can! His words were always rightly chosen, bringing grace and truth. So I must surrender this organ to the Master, trusting more than trying, believing that He can and will do this work of maturity in that moving member between the head and the heart.