

Who Controls Your Tongue?

Continuing from last week:

Doctrine of Witnessing

(review points)

1. Definition: Witnessing is the Body of Christ fulfilling its ministry of reconciliation to all on the outside.
2. You must understand the outsider.
3. Pertinent spiritual information is the issue, that is the gospel.
4. The ‘insider,’ that is the believer priest, is the agent in witnessing.
5. The witnessing of the believer-priest is the extension of his ambassadorship.
6. The concept of making the issue clear.
7. Effective witnessing depends on the ministry of God the HOLY SPIRIT: The ministry of the HOLY SPIRIT directed toward the believer in spirituality.

(this is where we left off last week)

8. Summary point:

- A. Pre-requisites for witnessing involve knowledge of pertinent doctrines related to the gospel. You should know doctrines related to the gospel.

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- B. Effectiveness of witnessing depends on the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.
 - C. Responsibility for witnessing belongs to every member of the Family of God.
 - D. Dynamics of witnessing depend upon the believer's mental attitude related to his spiritual growth and spiritual wisdom.
 - E. Clarity of witnessing depends on the believer's accurate understanding of the two deaths of Christ on the cross. You certainly do not need to bring these up every time you witness but you should have a clear understanding of all that happened on the cross.
 - F. Areas of witnessing include both the life and lips.
 - G. The challenge to witnessing comes from the doctrine of Unlimited Atonement.
 - H. The reward for witnessing is included in the believer's judgement at the Judgement Seat of Christ.
 - I. If you want a detailed dissertation on witnessing, the biblical pattern for witnessing is found in I Thessalonians chapter 2.
9. The postulates of pitfalls in witnessing or warnings about witnessing.
- A. Avoid argumentation. You may win the debate, but you won't win the soul. Your responsibility is to disseminate information,

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not to argue, over the validity of the information. You present it. Leave the rest to the Spirit.

B. Do not be sidetracked by false issues. False issues include such subjects as

(1) Is the Bible the Word of God? Listen, when you are holding a .45 semi-automatic pistol, you don't start defending it's power, you just shoot it. Well do the same with the Word of God.

(2) What about the people who have never heard?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Just give them biblical truth about the gospel. It will do its own persuasion along with the power of the Holy Spirit. You are holding something more powerful than a .45, you are holding the gospel of Jesus Christ.

C. Deal with the individual alone where possible. Witnessing in front of others creates false issues by producing embarrassment, loss of prestige, heckling.

D. Avoid getting into a rut, using the same approach in every case. Different approaches to the subject of the gospel are necessary

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for different people. Your flexibility comes from the filling and leading of the Holy Spirit and with your spiritual maturity.

- E. Avoid the false concept that you must speak to a certain number of people every day about Jesus Christ.
 - F. Avoid bragging about your experiences in witnessing.
 - G. Do not judge other believers for their apparent failure to witness. This is a matter between them and the Lord. Such judging and maligning only brings divine discipline on yourself. Whether other people are witnessing or not is not the issue.
10. The analogy to witnessing: Matthew 4:19, **Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.** The analogy can be carried out to those who are fishermen. They will appreciate it.

A fisherman must have a desire to fish. If you don't like to fish, you do not want to be in a boat fishing. Desire is a big thing, and that is also true of witnessing. You must have a desire to impart the gospel. You must love Jesus, and care about others. There must be true spiritual motivation.

A fisherman goes equipped. He knows what kind of bait to use, reels, line poles, etc. This is important in being a fisher of men. You must be equipped with the gospel.

They always go where the fish are located, they don't fish in their bathtub, cast off the freeway. They go where the fish are located. Or you have separated yourself from outsiders, from

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unbelievers? You have no one to whom to witness. Try to find yourself an unbeliever!!!

Fishermen always use the right bait: what works and what doesn't. This is the way it is with people when witnessing. They know what presentations are going to make the issue clear and what presentations are not. So, they are flexible in their ability to meet all kinds of witnessing situations.

Fishermen must be patient. Fishermen must stay out of sight, you never make an issue out of yourself when presenting the gospel. You must be patient. You merely make a presentation. When you get to the point where you get some negative signals, cut it off, change the subject, or peel off and get out of there. You have to be patient.

There's a great deal of enthusiasm about catching a fish. It is very stimulating of having the privilege of witnessing to someone and as a result of that information and the work of God the Holy Spirit seeing them believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life.

11. The principle of prayer in witnessing is encouraged by the Word of God.

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for them (that is for the Jews) is for their salvation.

So there is a bonafide prayer that people will hear the message and will respond.

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12. Effective witness belongs to those in spiritual maturity.

Proverbs 11:30. The fruit or production of the righteous (righteous refers to those believers who live continually in the power of the Holy Spirit—Galatians 5:5) **is a tree of life and he who is wise wins souls.**

This takes us right back to our study in

Colossians 4:5 walk in wisdom to those on the outside redeeming the time.

What is the motivation to witness to the outsiders, to unbelievers?

In the Church Age everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior is made a priest, a universal priesthood, having the same fundamental declaration as an Old Testament priest:

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

In the Church Age being made a royal priest is one of the 34 blessings every believer receives.

1 Peter 2:5 ...you also as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy

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priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race a Royal Priesthood so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

We have the privilege to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ to the world.

Now that we have completed the doctrine of witnessing, let us continue in Colossians 4:6

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace...

You will recall that Colossians chapters 3-4 concentrates on living a life that glorifies Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1 emphasizes your whole life: **since you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above.**

Then Colossians 3:2 starts with your mind—what you think **Set your mind on the things above**—what you think!

Then starting in Colossians 3:5 emphasizes *what you do!*

Now in Colossians 4:6 centers on *what you say!*

You see people, God wants all of you—all that you are: what you think, what you do and what you say.

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And all three of these areas must come under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Control of the tongue is one of the most basic issues in maturity

And for a biblical study of the tongue let's turn to James.

For the Christian and especially Christian parents, stability in life is found in the control of the tongue. If the tongue is loose, the believer is unstable. And parent, you have to start at a very young age teaching your children to control their tongues.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways...

This refers to the whole realm of sin in all categories. Mental Thinking sins, Sins of the Tongue and Overt sins. Now James goes to the most concentrated area of self-control and control over sins.

James 3:2 ...If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

Think about God and the design of creation. The human being is the only creation lower than angels who can build a vocabulary and speak intelligently to one another. When God designed the tongue—the mouth—all that is involved in speaking, He designed it for three primary uses:

- (1) Prayer with Him
- (2) Communicate with One Another
- (3) To proclaim that which is a blessing to others.

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But after the fall, that same tongue can be used to express cursing as well as blessing.

Perfect. What does this mean **he is a perfect man?** Wuest translates this **he is spiritually mature.** Other translations: **has reached full maturity; is a mature man.**

As to the difficulty in translating this Greek word The Complete Biblical Library in volume 6 states that this word “*is a highly complex and versatile adjective in classical Greek. Essentially the ideas behind the term include: mature, perfect, full-grown, ripe, complete.*” Thus the notion of ‘whole, complete’ is characteristic of teleios in whatever it modifies. Teleios was a significant term in Greek philosophical and ethical discussions. In simplified terms ‘perfection’ is variously expressed as ‘attainment of purpose’ or acquisition of wisdom or insight, and the ability to make the correct ethical or moral choice.”

I included all this to show you how important and significant control of the tongue is to your life.

Do not think of yourself as a mature Christian by how much doctrine you know or how often you go to church.

The true factor for spiritual maturity is your ability to control your tongue. What you say! What comes out of your mouth?

The rule of the tongue is ‘think’ before you engage!

Spiritual maturity is determined by your ability to make correct moral and spiritual choices in all you say.

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In the New Testament, the Greek word “teleios is a comparative adjective that presents God as the absolute model of perfection.”

Don't compare your speech with another person but with God, with Jesus Christ. Only through or by the Holy Spirit can we as imperfect beings be 'perfect' in our daily lives.

Along with this passage in James where this adjective is used in reference to the speech of a believer, is the passage by our Lord in

**Matthew 5:48 Therefore, you are to be perfect,
as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

This, of course, is impossible in the flesh, but God has supplied us with the inner power to be 'perfect' as He is perfect. So, to be 'perfect' as God is perfect, we must be perfect by the Holy Spirit who is God. And the same is true of our speech—it must be of the Holy Spirit.

**James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. If
anyone does not stumble in what he says,**

Arndt & Gingrich translates this verb 'to commit a sin, or sins.' We all commit sins in many different ways but here James is going to deal with our mouths. Stumble in what you say! Wow, this covers a multitude of things that come out of our mouths when we speak. From Colossians 4:6 we will see that all that comes out of our mouths should be 'grace.'

he is a perfect man, That is he is a spiritually mature believer, defined here as **able to bridle the whole body as well.** If you can control your tongue, control what comes out of your mouth, then you will be able to

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control your body! What is interesting here is, I know some who can control their bodies but not their tongues.

In the next paragraph, verses 3-8, James presents four illustrations of control of the tongue.

James 3:3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

For centuries, man has mastered the technique of controlling the horse. At the time of James (1st century of Church Age) the horse was a way of traveling first class. Here we see the humility of Jesus Christ of walking almost everywhere and making His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. But the best and more royal way of travel was on a horse.

The horse—big, brawny, graceful and powerful! Horse-power! Their tall frames are covered with huge muscles. And yet, man had learned how to control this tremendous power under him...by the simple means of putting a bit into the horse's mouth. The horse is the image of pure power—yet a weak human can control all that power by the bridle. **So that they will obey us, we direct their body as well.**

You see, there is a tender part of that big powerful horse, and that is in its mouth, and he will follow his mouth, no matter what he would rather do. So, by putting a bit in his mouth, we control what and where that horse will go. And what James is saying in this passage is that we as humans are in this respect like a horse, we follow our mouths! What the believer

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says is determined by what is in his soul. What the believer says reveals what you really are in your soul.

Just as the bridle controls the entire body of the horse, so the Holy Spirit controls the entire soul, body and mouth of the believer.

1. Control of the tongue is the criterion for control of the rest of your body.
2. Control of the tongue is dependent on control of the Holy Spirit.

Next, James now uses another simple illustration that everyone understood.

James 3:4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great...

James is not referring to a small fishing boat. The ship to which he is referring is the ship of the Greco-Roman world. It had a fairly high bow, a higher quarter deck and the wheel which is hooked on to the rudder. This was a merchant ship. The rudder directs the ship and keeps it sea worthy. Horses were used for transportation on land, while the ship was used for transportation on the sea. Yet, both were controlled by a very small item. The horse is useless without the bit and the ship was useless without the rudder. And the believer is useless without the Holy Spirit.

and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder. The rudder controls the direction of the ship just as the Holy Spirit controls the direction of the believer.

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wherever the inclination of the pilot/helsman desires. What is interesting here is that James says nothing more. That is, he does not explain what he is saying, the point is so obvious!

The point that James is making is that which controls the direction of the horse (a bit in its mouth) and that which controls the direction of a large boat (rudder) are very small and are compared to the small tongue that lies in the mouth of humans. So often, people try to think of what they can do to hurt someone else while a great damage can be done by your little tongue. The most dangerous weapon is the tongue. But it can also be the greatest of blessing. It all depends on who is in control, your flesh nature or the Holy Spirit. Everyone with a tongue and a vocabulary is a potential monster or a potential blessing.

1. The bit determines the direction of the large powerful horse.
2. The small rudder determines the direction of the large boat.
3. The tongue reveals what is inside of the believer, who is in control, the Inherited Sin Nature or the Holy Spirit.
4. The Inherited Sin Nature uses the thinking of the flesh nature while the Holy Spirit uses whatever doctrine you have in your soul.

Verses 5 and 6 give divine interpretation.

James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

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James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Learn about your tongue.

From science we learn that: The tongue is vital for chewing and swallowing food, as well as for speech. The four common tastes are sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. The tongue has many nerves that help detect and transmit taste signals to the brain.

But from the Word of God we learn more about the tongue.

1. The tongue is a small part of the body.
2. The tongue is a fire.
3. The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body.

OK, the tongue is a very small part of our entire bodies.

**James 3:5 ...and yet it boasts of great things.
See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!**

When you see a building on fire or a forest on fire do you ever stop and think that that fire probably started by a small match or small flame from a lighter?

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First, note the word *boast*: this is a compound Greek word made up of “*great things*” + “*to lift up*” But oh, people, this word refers to more than just boasting, this word refers to any kind of boasting that hurts others. Or a boasting that provokes anger in others or that stirs up strife between people. In our passage, this refers to boasting that hurts one another or causes strife between one another. But in the Septuagint, it refers to boasting that irritates the righteousness of God.

Ezekiel 16:50 Thus they (people of Sodom) **were haughty** (made great boast of their abominations, just like America is doing today) **and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.** (God just took Sodom out of existence, should America expect less?)

Also

Zeph. 3:11 “In that day (by the close of the seven years of Tribulation) **you** (this refers to Jews in rebellion against God) **will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones,** (this is our word—great boasting of abominable acts) **And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain.**

We will resume James 3:6 next Sunday.