STUDY 26: THE CHRISTIAN AND THE USE OF THE TONGUE
James 3:1-12

The fall of man in the Garden of Eden was preceded by a series of conversations through the use of the tongue resulting in persuasions that led to decisions and actions. The tongue is aptly being described as the little fire that kindles great matters of life-long consequences (Genesis 3). In His might, God brought out the children of Israel from Egypt, to journey to the Promised Land but the use of their tongues was strong enough to destroy majority in the wilderness (Numbers 14). Samson lost the power of God in his life and died a shameful death because this unruly evil, full of deadly poison within him was uncontrolled.

Examples abound in scriptures of people who through the misuse of tongue lost their heritage with God and made a shipwreck of their faith. We are however fortunate to learn from those who have gone before us (I Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4; Hebrews 3:19, 4:1-2). The Holy Spirit inspired James, the writer of the epistle, to reproof, correct and instruct us as Christians so as to overcome this pitfall. We shall study the text under three main headings:
1. Message for teachers,
2. Misuse of tongue, and
3. Mastery of tongue.

MESSAGE FOR TEACHERS
James 3:1-2
Masters or teachers referred to in these verses are 'brethren' - believers in the kingdom of God. It is noteworthy that the previous chapters we have studied were equally addressed to the brethren (1:2, 2:1, 5). God does not usually have much to tell people living in sin other than to repent of their sin and accept Christ as Lord and Saviour (Acts 20:21,3:19; Luke 24:48; Mark 1:15; Revelation 3:19-20; Isaiah 1:18-20; Ezekiel 14:6, 18:1-4, 19-22, 33:11; Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3,5). The message for the brethren is to avoid a judgmental, dictatorial and critical approach when correcting others (Deuteronomy 13:12-15, 17:2-6; I Samuel 1:12-15, John 7:24, II Timothy 2:14-26, Numbers 20:10-12; John 12:3-8; Matthew 7:1-5). This in no way rules out the place of doctrinal teachings, reproof, spirit-led corrections and biblical instructions in righteousness (I Timothy 3:16-17, 5:20; Titus 1:13; II Timothy 4:2-4; Joshua 7:10-12, 25-26; Acts 5:3-11).

MISUSE OF TONGUE
Jas. 3:2, 9-12.
Tongue can be misused in a number of ways (including):
1. Backbiting (Numbers 12:1-3).
2. Tale bearing (Leviticus 19:16).
3. Slander
5. Talkativeness (Proverbs 10:19).
6. False accusations (Mark 14:56).
8. Lying (Acts 5)
9. Loose / Rash speech (Ephesians 4:29, 5:3-4; 2 Kings 7).
10. Grudging / Murmuring (Numbers 21:4-6; Philippians 2:13-16)
11. Taking actions based on unconfirmed / incomplete or inaccurate information (Deuteronomy 17:2-6; James 1:19-20)
13. Exaggerations – Note Jesus’ admonition: “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” (Matthew 5:37).

None of these should be found in the life of a heaven-bound believer (Ephesians 4:31; Titus 3:1-2; James 4:11; I Peter 2:1; 3:9-10).

MASTERY OF TONGUE
James. 3:3-8

Horses, ships, every kind of beast, birds, serpents and sea creatures can be, and have been tamed by mankind, but the tongue can no man tame. This implies that salvation from sin can only be obtained through grace, and not self-righteousness (Acts 13:38-39; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Not the labours of my hands,
Can fulfill Thy law's demand;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save and Thou alone

Augustus M. Toplady

The fountain of spoken words is the heart of man (Matthew 12:33-37; Job 14:4), it is important that the heart be purged by the blood of Jesus before the tongue can be mastered (Acts 8: 18-23). Imperceptive backsliding of the heart manifests through careless and foul statements from the tongue. When the spiritual life of a Christian is on the decline, talkativeness increases. It is a true saying that an empty barrel makes the loudest noise.

The solution then is to go back to God in prayers; asking Him that we want to be like Jesus. Furthermore, a believer must be sober - thinking before speaking, prayerful, sanctified, slow to speak but quick to hear. The Word of God must be rich in the heart so that out of its abundance, the mouth will speak.