

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

A SMALL FIRE

*A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
PART THIRTY THREE OF SIXTY FOUR*

A forest set ablaze by a carelessly dropped match or a wind blown spark is one of the most devastating and fearful sights man can behold. With all of his knowledge and ingenuity, man is almost helpless before the onslaught of a forest fire. Such a holocaust can have a small beginning, but in the end be monstrous.

To impress upon our minds the great potential for evil that is in the tongue, James likens it to a small fire which spreads over a wide area. "So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire" (James 3:5)!

Almost all of James 3 deals with the tongue and speech, but the subject is of such immense importance that James refers to it in other places also (James 1:19; 4:11). No member of the body presents greater potential for evil than the tongue. While man has learned to control much of nature, his tongue runs unchecked "over the affairs of our neighbors, detracting, depreciating,

suspecting, or scorning and holding up to ridicule" (Brown). It is difficult to govern a loose tongue. The small fire from uncontrolled lips spreads quickly and is deadly. Soon destruction spreads to a family, a church, a community, and perhaps even to a nation. Remember that a match is consumed in the fire it starts, and the undisciplined tongue also meets its doom in the destruction it creates. "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Psalm 34:13; I Peter 3:10).

"Just a word, an ill-considered, malicious, slanderous, lustful, ill-natured word, dropped without thought or intention, as one would drop a lighted match, and the result is the destruction of a noble and stately forest. The evil is started, and no man can overtake it" (Brown). Is it any wonder then that James tells us "the tongue is a fire" and that the fire in the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (James 3:6)? The faith of Jesus and the profane tongue do not abide in the same individual. If a tree bears olives, it is not a fig (James 3:9-12).

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