

THE BEREAN

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

DEADLY POISON

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

In seeking to impress on our minds the great influence for evil potential in the tongue, James uses many vivid metaphors. Among these is the description of the tongue as being "full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). There are some poisons that will make us sick and uncomfortable, but are not fatal. The uncontrolled tongue is death-bearing. We do all we can to avoid the poisons that might bring even slight discomfort to our physical systems. Why should we not work even more to throw out the death-bearing poison of souls which lives in an uncontrolled tongue. Let not "the poison of asps" be under our lips (Romans 3:13).

The uncontrolled tongue is wicked and destructive. It is inconsistent for it blesses God and curses men. While the first is a profession of being a child of God, the second is a denial. Such inconsistency just "ought not so to be" (James 3:10). But we need not use curse words to curse man for we may in some way verbally destroy him. James shows that nature is even more consistent for a spring does not send forth both sweet water and bitter (James 3:11). If it is a sweet spring, its waters are life-giving, but if it is

brackish, death awaits. As the water of a spring comes from the heart of the earth, so man's speech comes from his heart "for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). The tongue is merely a tool of the unconverted heart. "Can a fig tree...yield olives, or a vine figs? neither can salt water yield sweet" (James 3:12).

The answer to a foul tongue is a clean heart. No man can control his tongue because he alone cannot cleanse his heart. The power of God is needed to cleanse our hearts and to control our tongues. We must purify our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9) which comes from the word of God (Romans 10:17), and by obedience to His will (I Peter 1:22). While James stresses the evil potential in the tongue, there is suggested the great potential for good. The tongue that is under Divine guidance has great possibilities. Cleansed and controlled by God, it can bless, comfort, exhort, encourage, and persuade. Let our tongues send forth only sweet and never deadly poison.

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