

James 3:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

Analysis

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, staining the whole body, setting on fire the course of nature, and itself set on fire by hell (Gehenna, γέεννα). James vividly portrays speech as instrument of hellish destruction when uncontrolled.

Reformed demonology acknowledges Satan's desire to use speech to divide. James reminds believers that tongues can become pipelines of hell or instruments of grace; neutrality is impossible.

Historical Context

Gehenna imagery resonated with Jews familiar with Jerusalem's refuse fire. Diaspora believers faced slanderous accusations; James warns them not to return fire with hellish speech. Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4:27 to not give the devil opportunity parallels this.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Where has your speech carried the smell of hell rather than heaven?
2. What disciplines can purify your tongue's fire?
3. How can you respond to provocation with sanctified words?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα πῦρ· ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας οὕτως
And G3588 the tongue is a fire G3588 a world G3588 of iniquity G93 so
G2532 G1100 G4442 G2889 G93 G3779

ἡ γλῶσσα καθίσταται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν ἡ
the tongue is among members our G3588
G3588 G1100 G2525 G1722 G3196 G2257 G3588

σπιλοῦσα ὅλον τὸ σῶμα καὶ φλογιζομένη τὸν
that it defileth the whole G3588 body And it is set on fire G3588
G4695 G3650 G4983 G2532 G5394 G3588

τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως καὶ φλογιζομένη ὑπὸ τῆς γεέννης
the course G3588 of nature And it is set on fire of G3588 hell
G5164 G1078 G2532 G5394 G5259 G1067

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 16:27 (Parallel theme): An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.

Mark 7:15 (Parallel theme): There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

Proverbs 15:1 (Parallel theme): A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Luke 16:24 (Parallel theme): And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

Proverbs 6:19 (Parallel theme): A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Psalms 140:3 (Parallel theme): They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

Psalms 64:3 (Parallel theme): Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:

Acts 5:3 (Parallel theme): But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

Acts 6:13 (Parallel theme): And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

Matthew 5:22 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.