

## RELIGION

**“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” (James 1:26)**

Fact # 1 - The Garden of Eden was originally a beautiful example of health and unity. Man was in harmony with God and also with his fellow man. Even the animals got along with one another. There was no bloodshed in Eden for God is not the Author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33).

Fact # 2 - Sin separates! Sin separated man from God and also from his neighbor. The Hebrew word for “evil” in Gen. 2:9 is “ra” and comes from the root “ra a” which literally means “breaking to pieces”. In other words, when Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and “evil” the unity in Eden was fragmented. Cain killed his brother and even the animals started killing one another.

Fact # 3 - God is in the process of healing our fragmented universe so that we will be “one” in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Our English word “religion” is an appropriate word to describe this process. It comes from the Latin “re” and “ligare” and literally means “to bind back”. When God takes away sin He “binds us back” to himself and also to our fellow men. Jesus said that a proper love for God and our neighbor summarizes the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40). A proper use of the tongue is of pivotal importance in this process for God has chosen to reconcile the world by means of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21) Bible words for healing present the same idea. The Hebrew “rapha” means to “repair” or to “mend by stitching”, and the Greek “sozo” means “to make whole”. Remember! The leaves of the tree of life are for the “healing” or “therapy” of the nations (Rev. 22:2). Isaiah told of a time when wolves, leopards, and lions, would live peaceably with little children and domesticated animals (Is. 11:1 - 9). This remarkable transformation will be brought about by preaching, for the Gospel is the “power of God” for all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

Therefore, Gospel preachers are to use their tongues in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Conversion first reconciles us to God, and then to our fellow men. It doesn’t matter whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, male or female, we become one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). This unity in Christ involves the “eternal purpose” of God and represents His “manifold wisdom”. This “healing” of relationships is so significant that it is constantly being scrutinized by “the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10). Conversely, creating and maintaining division is a major goal of Satan. Division also comes from the use of the tongue. This is why the unbridled tongue can render our religion as worthless.

So we have a choice. We can grumble, find fault, boast and flatter to divide the Body of Christ (Jude 16 - 19). Or we can use our tongue to promote peace and mutual edification (Rom. 14:19). We can use the tongue to express bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander, or we can put corrupt communication out of our mouths and build up others according to their needs (Eph. 4:29 - 32).

James, by inspiration, reminds us that a fig tree cannot bear olives and a salt spring cannot produce fresh water (Ja. 3:12). Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). Our words define who we are. Earthly, sensual words come from an earthly heart and produce “disorder”. Spiritual words come from a heavenly heart and produce “peace” (Ja. 3:13 - 18).

There is an old joke about the mad mother who complained to the president of their local college. “We sent our daughter to you expecting her to soar like an eagle, but instead she came home an ugly duckling.” The president replied: “If you expect us to hatch an eagle, you have to send us an eagle egg”.

The difference between pure religion and vain religion is foundational. Salt springs cannot produce sweet water and duck eggs do not produce eagles. Fortunately Jesus Christ specializes in changing hearts. He patiently knocks at the door of the lukewarm Christian. When we open that door, old things pass away and all things become new. With His help we can keep a tight rein on our tongue so that our religion will not be rendered worthless!