

# THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

Who would you say is the worst member of the Brackenhurst Baptist Church? That is a sobering, yet important, question.

Perhaps you are thinking of that member who refuses to faithfully gather with the body as we come together to worship, learn and serve. Or perhaps you are thinking of a member who is characterised as being a bit cantankerous or arrogant—and just basically “otherwise.” Such members can be rather disheartening for the church. Perhaps you are thinking of the member who has been exposed for some ongoing sin and even disciplined for it. No doubt such members can cause great sorrow within the body of Christ.

Yet I don't think that any of these are our worst members. Though they can bring much heartache, the member I have in mind is often far more destructive. And this member needs to be exposed, for the sake of the health and harmony of our church.

The member that I have in mind is rather small, yet very potentially and potently destructive. Our worst member is usually quite invisible, yet this member of our body can do a whole lot of visible damage. Are you ready for the identity of our worst member? It is the *tongue*. The damage done from this member of our body does a lot of damage to our Body. Currently we have over 260 of them.

Many years ago *The Times* of London posted an article title “What's Wrong with the World?” G. K. Chesterton responded in a letter, “Dear Sir: Regarding your article ‘What's Wrong with the World?’ I am. Yours truly, G. K. Chesterton.”

If we were asked the same question concerning the church—“What's wrong with our *church*?”—perhaps we should all respond, “I am.” In most cases, the major fault would lie (pun intended) with our tongue.

James wrote,

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and

Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

(James 3:5-10)

But though “these things ought not to be so,” the reality is that all too often it is “so,” and the result is that church history is littered with the debris of broken relationships, ruined reputations, broken hearts, and hindered ministry.

If each of us would be alert to that member of our physical body that tends to be the most ruinous, and hence our worst member, then the spiritual body of

our church would be less wounded, more sweet than bitter, more fresh than brackish.



I love what someone once said about James 3:8 concerning the tongue: “The text says that no human being can tame it; it doesn’t say no one can tame it. Jesus can!”

Each morning, it would be helpful if each of us offered the members of our body to the Lord as a living sacrifice to him (Romans 12:1–2). And we should probably begin with that member of our body most susceptible to sinning—our *tongue*. Perhaps if we are more conscious of the propensity of our tongue being the worst member of all, we would be more zealous to use it as a means of grace, rather than misusing it as a means of grief.

I recall the story of a man who had been terribly slandered by someone who became angry with him. After the man’s reputation was dragged through the mud, losing what had been much influence for good, the enemy repented. The slandered man forgave him. But then he did something that appeared rather odd. He took a goose down pillow, slit it open with a knife and then shook its contents out of his second story window. The wind carried the feathers in all different directions. The reputation-injured man then asked his former enemy to go and fetch the scattered feathers. The man protested, “I could never reclaim all of those feathers.” The wounded man responded, “And though I forgive you, neither will I ever be able fully reclaim my reputation.” That is a powerful reminder of the destructive potential of the tongue.

On the other hand, this little member can be used for so much good. So, use it to pray for one another. Someone has said, if you feel the need to talk about someone, then do so on your knees to your heavenly Father. By God’s grace, what at times can be our worst member, can be tamed and transformed as a powerful instrument of encouragement and edification.

But further, our tongues can also be used to proclaim the glorious gospel! What a privilege to use our tongues to point the lost to Christ, to share the message of the Son of God who lived the perfect life that we could not live. He was always righteous, including in the use of his tongue. He then died in our place, suffering God’s wrath, which we deserved. He then rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of God, interceding for everyone who repents and believes on him. That is something to talk about. That is something to joyfully speak about. That is something that has the power to transform what can be our worst member into being our most fruitful member. This, James would tell us, is the way it *ought* to be.