

Aug 23, 2020



Oaks Early Risers Bible Class

The Oaks Baptist Church
Grand Prairie, Texas

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:
To bridle your tongue, give God the reins of your heart

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:
Lord, set a watch upon my lips,
My tongue control today;
Help me evaluate each thought
And guard each word I say.
—Hess

SCRIPTURE FOR THE WEEK:
In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise

(Prov 10:19 NKJV)

(from "Our Daily Bread", Oct 05, 2001)

Series: Many Faces of Wisdom

UNIT: Faith and Wisdom in James

NEXT WEEK

Two Kinds of Wisdom (James 3:13-18; 5:7-12)

Taming the Tongue **James 3:1-12**

Lesson Background and Introduction

The longer we live, the more acutely we are aware of the power of the tongue to destroy. From the days when we hurled schoolyard taunts or insults (or were on the receiving end of those), we realized the power of words to hurt or damage. Every generation seems to learn this lesson the hard way. Consider, for example, the impact of social media in the world in general and in the church in particular. With fingers typing as an extension of the tongue, Christians argue sharply with each other about faith, politics, etc., in publicly visible Facebook threads. Prominent ministers and authors quarrel with one another on Twitter; relationships are strained or broken on ill-considered tweets of 280 characters or fewer. What would the Bible writers say about such practices? Today's lesson concerns the destructive power of the tongue. Specifically, it deals with the words spoken by those who were recognized as teachers in the first-century church (and perhaps those who aspired to that role). Their words were of special concern to James because they involved matters that have an eternal import. All of us can think of ways in which words spoken by teachers have had beneficial or damaging effects on the lives of their hearers. Words should be a source of spiritual growth and sustenance. But how many of us have seen church splits that resulted from ill-advised words? How many of us have seen men and women leave the faith because of spiritually damaging utterances? These concerns lie at the heart of today's text. James's description of the tongue may lead us to conclude that attempting to control it is hopeless. Admittedly, the tongue is extremely difficult to control, as we know all too well. All of us have said things that we came to regret. What is more, the work of taming the tongue is a lifelong task. While today's text directly addressed teachers, it calls on all Christians to examine themselves.

(Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Educate Wisely - Teaching and interpreting God's Word may look like a glamorous job, but those who stand up to instruct people representing God need to take this responsibility extremely seriously. Also, a walk of integrity should go hand in hand with this responsibility. This calling to interpret the Scriptures can influence the heart of people to go one way or another.

A Life of Integrity - No human being will teach the Bible 100% correctly, nor have a completely pure, sin-free life. James did not call for perfection. However, a teacher needs to humbly ask God for His help and empowerment to live with integrity because teaching is not in the background but upfront, helping people come to a greater understanding of God. What teachers say should not be self-centered, boastful, overly critical, gossipy, or insincere, but instead help students to see God's love for them.

Tongue Control - James used examples to show the influence of one's speech. He described the tongue as a small instrument controlling something of greater magnitude, like a boat regulated by a tiny rudder or a healthy horse put in check by a little bit in his mouth. A tiny wooden match can cause a major forest fire. The tongue can speak truthfully or tell lies causing a person to go in a constructive or destructive direction. James admitted that bringing the tongue under control is quite the task. Animals are more natural to tame. No human can bring their tongue under submission on their own; divine intervention is needed. The Holy Spirit should take over, communicating to the individual to be quiet or to speak up.

What Is Your Reputation? - It is impossible for a Christian's tongue to go in two different directions at the same time, praising God and at the same time ripping apart another brother or sister. A woman once came to John Wesley and said she knew what her talent was: "I think my talent from God is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "I do not think God would mind if you buried that talent." One's conversation is a good indication of what is rumbling around on the inside of the heart, labeling the person as wise or foolish.

(Adapted from the Echoes Commentary)

NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

Control for Teachers (James 3:1)

Consider the decision of being a teacher

Because there is only one true Teacher and that is Jesus (Matt 23:8)

Because as a teacher we should speak what we know and have seen from God (John 3:10-12)

Because to be a teacher, one must have first been taught himself (Rom 2:17-21)

Because God appoints true teachers (1 Cor 12:28)

Consider the accountability of being a teacher

Accountability to warn and tell others about God's requirements (Ezek 3:18-19)

Accountability of doing God's will when we know it (Luke 12:47-48)

Accountability of faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2)

Accountability of having to give account of those we teach (Heb 13:17)

Consider the judgment of being a teacher

Judgment of pride (Luke 20:45-47)

Judgment of not understanding what we say or teach (1 Tim 1:5-7)

Judgment of not teaching sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3-4)

Judgment of not maturing in the Word (Heb 5:12)

Judgment of being a false teacher (2 Peter 2:1)

Judgment of being a stumbling block (Matt 23:15)

Control Tongue's Power (James 3:2-8)

Don't let the tongue make others stumble

Stumble into condemnation (Matt 12:37)

It is better to lose our tongue than to let it make others stumble (Matt 5:29)

Stumble by living according to the flesh (Rom 8:13)

Stumble by not disciplining our body and bringing it into subjection to God (1 Cor 9:27)

Power of the tongue

Power to be like a sword (Prov 12:18-19)

Power of life and death (Prov 18:21)

Power to take advantage (Jude 16)

Power to defile oneself (Matt 15:11)

Power of poison and deceit (Rom 3:13)

Taming the tongue

Tame by keeping our tongues from evil (Ps 34:13)

Tame by guarding our tongues and ways (Ps 39:1)

Tame by ensuring our tongues are guided by God (Prov 16:1)

Tame by guarding our mouth (Prov 21:23)

Tame by bridling our tongues (James 1:26)

Control Purity of Tongue (James 3:9-12)

Control purity of tongue by rejecting sin

Sin affects tongues because sin makes the tongue cause one to be unclean (Matt 15:11)

Sin affects tongues because speaking rashly causes ruin (Prov 13:3)

Sin affects tongues because it keeps one from keeping control over their tongues (James 1:26)

Sin affects tongues if we allow our sinful natures to rule (Rom 3:12-14)

Control purity of tongue by committing to guard speech

Commit to seek God to guarding our lips (Ps 141:3)

Commit to guarding our mouths (Prov 21:23)

Commit to muzzling our speech (Ps 39:1)