

In 3:8 James might be saying no *PERSON* can control the tongue. How then can the tongue be controlled? (*role of scripture, prayer, role of the Holy Spirit, accountability partner*)

Each individual or couple take one of the verses below. Think about what they say to you about the importance of this topic and their relationship to the verses in James. What principles can you gain from them? What relational sin or relational unity do they produce?

Psalms 19:14

Proverbs 15:1-4

Proverbs 18:21

Matthew 12:34-37

Matthew 15:10-11

Colossians 4:6

1 John 4:19-21

How might silence (withholding words of encouragement, wisdom or insight, not sharing one's testimony, not standing up for what is true, etc.) be as harmful as inappropriate speech?

The tongue can be used to build up as well as tear down. What are some simple words or phrases that can be used to be supportive, encouraging, optimistic, empathetic, etc.? Why are words like this important?

The tongue has the power to destroy, or the power to encourage and restore. More often, do you speak words of death, or words of life? In practical terms, how do we allow the Holy Spirit to do a work within us to bring about the kind of heart transformation that is required?

James 3:1-12

Discussion Group Questions

May 11, 2008

LESSON 6

Dr. Jerry Nelson

For discussion following the sermon on May 11, 2008

Taming the Tongue

Key Points

Once again (as in 2:12-26) James writes about genuine saving faith. Back in 1:26 he wrote "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." In 3:1-12, James will develop that idea. As with our works (2:12-26), so also our speech reveals the true nature of our hearts. James' words here in 3:1-12 are not just a moralism of being careful with our speech, it is a major indicator of true faith.

But the text is not only for those with "worthless religion;" the ideas also apply to all of us. James brings to light the importance of controlling our tongues, the power of words and the speech as the overflow of our hearts. And this is a spiritually serious matter.

Are you ever amazed at the inappropriate, sometimes harsh words that Christians use to describe others—perhaps those of a different persuasion or worldview? Are you convicted and/or challenged by what you hear coming from your own mouth at times? We find it easy to praise God for his goodness, and at the same time, be critical of the people he made in his image. Two opposites (cannot?) (should not?) be flowing from the same point of origin. How are we to respond when we find both the necessity and the impossibility of controlling our words?

Truly the issue lies not only in what we say and how we say it, but the condition of our inner thoughts and motivations. Without a transformation of the heart, simply exercising the discipline of "biting your tongue" may only lead to frustration and/or failure.

Greater internal work needs to be accomplished—the work of the Spirit. Pride and self-promotion are often behind unkind words. Our challenge is to allow the Spirit to convict us and shape us, and we must willingly lay down our selfishness and pride. May our spiritual formation be evident by the loving words we speak and the absence of words that destroy.

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

Think back through several conversations you have had recently at home, work, recreation, with friends or at church. What words would your listeners use to describe your attitude toward them or others? (If you don't know, ask someone.) What words would you use to describe yourself? Are they the same words? If not, what's the difference?

Reflect upon the means God has used to change your heart attitudes and ultimately the way you related to others over the past several years. What significant change has taken place? Take time to praise God for his work in you.

Do you more often speak words of life and encouragement to others, or do you find your words critical, harsh, demeaning or judgmental? Is there anything you want to change? If so, what is your next step?

Group Preparation

It will be important to be aware of the movement of the Spirit in your discussion. If the conversations surface issues that bring about conviction, stop and pray. It would be tempting to gloss over or marginalize this lesson with "everybody says things they shouldn't say." Pray for the power and presence of the Spirit, along with discernment.

It will be equally important to help your group understand how to rely upon the Spirit to change their hearts. There is a dynamic at work: our part and God's part. We must be comfortable in the ambivalence of what is his work. Our obedience or resistance could contribute to a changed heart, or one that is increasingly hardened.

Discussion Questions:

Considering verses 1:26 and 3:6, describe the kind of speech that would nearly convince you that the speaker is not truly a Christian? What might that speech be from the lips of one who claims to be a Christian?

If speech, like works, is evidence of genuine saving faith, what does that say about we who are careless with our words? How do we take James seriously and, at the same time, not lose confidence in our salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?

Have you encountered a situation where someone's opinion ended up hurting another person or making a situation worse? Describe.

How would you approach an individual who you wanted to chastise or correct for their use of their tongue? As a contrast, describe an approach that might be counter-productive.

Can the sharing of prayer requests be little more than gossip and have unintended consequences?

Are you seeing your speech patterns being reproduced in your children? What has this taught you?