

When we start to think about *Taming our Tongues* we tend to immediately think of the kind of 'bad language' which we, as Christians shouldn't be using. James' emphasis on controlling our tongues, however, goes so much further than this. The 'mega themes' which are evident throughout the Book of James are also important to think about when considering the kinds of words we use or don't use. In this bible study, we're going to look at some things which affect the tongue like humility or pride, wisdom or folly and judgment. We'll also look at the advice which James gives us on using the tongue for evangelism and teaching.

We speak between 18 and 25 thousand words a day. That's a lot of words! That's a lot of potential for good and harm. James mentions the tongue in every chapter so it is obviously important to him. True faith will be demonstrated by speech. The tongue is the revealer of the heart. James personifies the tongue as the living symbol of what is in the heart. As J.C. Ryle said;

*"Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring."*

We will never be perfect in this life but James says that if our speech is perfect we will be able to keep our bodies in check. We should be striving to be more like Jesus and for Jesus to be in control of every part of our lives, that includes our words. We need to be disciplined in our speech.

James Chapter 3 v. 1-12 uses 2 analogies to show how the tongue can control the whole person. He uses the examples of a horse and a ship which are much larger and faster than human beings but which can be controlled by a very small part. He then uses a negative example of a spark which can set the whole forest on fire. In the same way an untamed tongue can wreck havoc for the whole body.

James shows how the tongue has huge potential for both good and evil – *"Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing, My brothers and sisters this should not be."*(3:10).

The bible verses which are mentioned in the bible study are littered with examples of how the tongue can be a device of evil. Scripture describes the tongue as a piercing sword, a weapon of ruin, a scorching fire, an instrument of harmful gossip, an agent of false teachings, a device for lies, complaint and argument. Similarly, there are many other examples of how the tongue and the words which we use can be harmful; putting others down, pride, manipulation, exaggeration, flattery, ridicule and sarcasm.

God's word offers us the alternative as well. He tells us how carefully chosen words or sometimes simply refraining from speaking at all can bring healing, can guard life, can sow seeds of peace (James Ch. 3 v. 18), are merciful and sincere (Ch.3 v. 17), encouraging, loving and righteous.

James encourages us to beware of speaking prejudiced words; Jesus summarized the law as love for God and neighbour (Matthew Ch. 22 v. 37-40) and Paul said that love demonstrated towards a neighbour would fully satisfy the law (Romans Ch. 13 v. 6-10). When we fail to be loving we are actually breaking God's law. In James Ch. 2 v. 8-9, James challenges the way in which the words we choose can sometimes show favouritism. Similarly in Ch. 4 v.11-12, James asks us, as Christians, not to be judgemental of one another. If we look at our attitudes and actions towards others do we build people up or tear them down? If we are actively seeking a *Tame Tongue* then we should have God's law of love in the forefront of our minds and resist both criticism and favouritism.

We can often feel proud about our achievements, but forget that everything good in our lives is a God given blessing. We are good at showing modesty through words but can be insincere in what we say. Humility comes from the heart; a reflection of Gods compassion for those who have less than us or are looked down upon. James Ch. 1 v. 21 says "...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." It is difficult to be humble when we don't feed ourselves with God's word or spend time in his presence, as God is the only one who knows the extent of our sinful nature. Through confession and mourning over our sins before God, we are humbled and faced with the reality of that sinful nature. From this point, God will lift us up in his good time, according to what is best for us (James Ch. 4 v. 10).

James letter has an overriding theme of Godly wisdom. As *The Message* introduces the Book of James;

*"Deep and living wisdom is on display here; wisdom both rare and essential. This kind of wisdom is both knowledge of the truth and a skill in living. What good is a truth if we don't know how to live it? What good is an intention if we can't sustain it?"*

James encourages us to live what he call an honorable life (Jams Chapter 3 v. 13) – one free from selfish ambition, pride, boasting, lying and jealousy; the things which are not Gods kind of wisdom (Chapter 3 v. 15). These kinds of things can often be evident in the things we say indeed how we say them. As such, Godly wisdom is intrinsic to *Taming our Tongues*. James tells us how to achieve this kind of wisdom early on in the book; the same way in which Solomon did (1 Kings Chapter 3 v.5-9, 12). As Dale Ralph Davis said;

*"...Even though we are not Kings as Solomon was...is not the God to whom we come the same lavish and generous God...Is it not the same God who meets us in James Ch. 1 v. 5 where the apostle urges 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from the giving God.'"*

In James Chapter 3 v. 1-2, James realises the danger in being a teacher; their words and lifestyles can be judged more strictly by other people. As David's commentary says; being teachers also puts "both life and words under Gods scrutiny and he would hold them responsible for misleading the flock in word or deed." Perhaps the way we say things could make someone feel inadequate or discourage them. When used with Godly wisdom, however, our words can help to ground Christians in solid teaching; they can encourage people, help them to discover and use their gifts and empower them for service.

A life of good witness can be destroyed by one careless word. We can't take our words back, they have a lasting impact. Our witness can be looked upon with indignation if we talk about people behind their backs or fail to say something in love. When our words and actions go together in a genuine Christ-like fashion, however, they can be used ultimately to the glory of God; to show love to those around us who are not Christians and to build them up.