

“A Worthless Religion”
(James 1:26)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. James has been warning us about the danger involved in anger.
 - a. That our impure anger does not bring about God’s righteousness.
 - (i) When we’re agitated, it’s very likely we’re going to sin.
 - (ii) More is stirred in our hearts than righteous indignation.
 - (iii) Very often we end up injuring our neighbors unjustly.
 - (iv) We break the law of love, and so we need to be careful.
 - b. Paul tells us, “Be angry, but do not sin” (Eph. 4:26).
 - (i) Being offended at what is unjust and sinful is good.
 - (ii) Being stirred in your spirit can give you the strength to do something about it.
 - (iii) But reacting to it in a sinful way won’t help.
 - (iii) And so we must keep a check on our spirit.
2. As a precautionary measure, James gave us five commands:
 - a. Be quick to hear: listen, don’t just react.
 - b. Be slow to speak:
 - (i) Be careful what you say.
 - (ii) Think through the issues carefully before you speak.
 - (iii) Again, don’t be reactionary: an emotional response, especially if it’s a wrong response, will lead to sin.
 - c. Be slow to anger: subdue the sinful tendency in your hearts.
 - d. Put off the abounding corruption in your hearts and receive the implanted Word of God:
 - (i) Attack the root not just the fruit.
 - (ii) Subdue your sin so that you may receive God’s Word.
 - e. Put what you know into practice:
 - (i) To know won’t do you any good unless you do what you know.
 - (ii) If you know God’s will and don’t do it, you’re only deceiving yourself regarding your spiritual state:
 - (a) If you do not obey at all.
 - (b) Jesus tells us there are no no-fruit Christians (John 15:5).
 - (c) But remember, even Christians struggle with obedience.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, James gives us another test to show us whether or not we’re deceiving ourselves regarding our spiritual condition: the use of the tongue.
 - a. The Bible says a great deal about the tongue.
 - b. It is one of the most powerful abilities we possess: communicate ideas, bless God, evangelize.

- c. But it is also one of the best indicators of our spiritual state.
 - (i) It is like a fountain that flows from our heart: our mouth is the opening (James 3:11).
 - (iii) Jesus said, “*It is* not what enters into the mouth *that* defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man” (Matt. 15:11).
 - (iv) When His disciples asked Him about this, He told them, “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (vv. 17-19).
- 2. This morning, we’re looking at what our speech says about the condition of our heart.
 - a. First, let’s consider what James means by “bridling the tongue.”
 - b. Second, that if we do not bridle our tongues, what this indicates regarding our spiritual condition.
 - c. Finally, what we can do to bridle our tongues.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let’s consider what James means by “bridling the tongue.”
 - 1. To bridle the tongue means literally to control our speech, as a bit and bridle is used to control a horse.
 - a. It means to hold it in check, to direct its actions.
 - b. Not to do so for our tongue means to allow it to get out of control.
 - c. Louw-Nida, in their Greek Lexicon, say it “may be rendered as ‘one who does not tell his tongue what to say’ or ‘one who cannot tie his tongue down’ or ‘one who cannot stop his talking.’”
 - 2. The idea is, of course, that we bridle/control ungracious speech.
 - a. Obviously, one who has the gift to speak freely about the Lord in evangelizing is good.
 - (i) James is not saying that we shouldn’t do everything we can to broadcast the Gospel.
 - (ii) Jesus pictures the evangelist as one who scatters his seed on all the different soils around him (Matt. 13).
 - (iii) In this case there is a definite goal and purpose: to bring light in the darkness and the lost to Christ.
 - (iv) In this instance, the tongue is controlled and used in a specific and good way.
 - b. Just as obviously, he is not limiting how much we should praise the Lord.
 - (i) Our desire should always be to lift up His praise, to sing hymns to Him, to encourage others in worshipping Him.
 - (ii) We should all be striving to do these two things.
 - c. What James has in mind are the more destructive uses of the tongue.
 - (i) Saying things that tear others down directly or in the eyes of others, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29).

- (ii) Telling stories or jokes that aren't fitting for Christians, "And *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:4).
 - (iii) Lying, falsely accusing others, and saying things that divide the body of Christ, "There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers" (Prov. 6:16-19). Three of the seven have to do with the tongue.
 - (iv) Even speaking too much and too freely, on things we really don't know well enough, or in telling things that should remain hidden, to the injury of our neighbor.
 - (a) "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19).
 - (b) "The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (Prov. 13:3).
 - (iv) In short, using our gift of speech in a way contrary to the Law of love.
 - (a) Paul tells us, "Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person" (Col. 4:6).
 - (b) This is useful in Christ's body, as well as with outsiders.
- d. What he may have more specifically in mind is how we use our tongues when angry.
- (i) Our liability to every misuse of the tongue increases with our anger.
 - (ii) That's why it's especially wise to hold our tongues when we are angry.
 - (iii) If we don't have control of our hearts, we'll very likely not have control of our mouths.
- e. And so what James means here regarding bridling our tongues is having control over what we say: using our tongues for God's glory and not for sin.
- B. Second, let's consider that if we do not bridle our tongues, what this indicates regarding our spiritual condition: James tells us plainly that if we don't control what we say, then we are deceiving ourselves regarding our spiritual state.
1. He is not speaking here about Christian imperfection.
 - a. Even the best Christian is a mixture of good and bad, of grace and sin.
 - b. All of us are going to have those times when we say things we shouldn't, when our anger gets the best of us.
 - (i) We need to acknowledge this; not use it as an excuse to continue in it.
 - (ii) We must repent of it, and seek the forgiveness of those we've offended with our tongues.
 2. Rather, James is speaking of one who doesn't have control and isn't seeking to control his tongue.
 - a. Christians are capable of committing any sin the unbeliever commits.
 - b. The difference is that the Christians repents and tries to subdue/kill his sin.
 - (i) Because he hates it.
 - (ii) Because it dishonors God.

- c. The unbeliever doesn't repent.
 - (i) He may be sorry for the consequences, but he doesn't hate it.
 - (ii) He may turn from it for other reasons, but not because it dishonors God.

- 3. If a person doesn't repent, no matter how "religious" or "pious" that individual may think he might be, his religion is worthless.
 - a. It's the same word Paul uses when he says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).
 - b. This kind of religion can't save you.
 - c. If this is the kind you have, you must repent and turn to Christ.
 - (i) "Religion" can't save you.
 - (ii) Looking like you're doing the right thing won't help you.
 - (iii) Only faith in Christ can save you.

- C. Finally, what can we do to bridle our tongues: The only way we can is again by attacking the root of the problem.
 - 1. Consider the source: Our hearts.
 - a. We were reminded at the beginning what Jesus said:
 - (i) Out of the heart, the mouth speaks.
 - (ii) It's what comes out of our hearts that defiles, not what goes in.
 - (iii) Jesus told the Pharisees on another occasion, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:34-37).

 - b. The problem is in our hearts: the way we speak shows what's already there.

 - 2. To cure the problem then, we must deal with our hearts.
 - a. We must come to Christ, if we haven't.
 - b. And, if we have, we must again determine to kill all our sins.
 - (i) There is only one cure for the tongue or any other sin: mortification.
 - (ii) We must also be filled with what will make us speak graciously: that is grace – the Holy Spirit.
 - (iii) True religion – the presence of the Spirit of God in the heart – tames the heart and therefore the tongue.

 - c. And so let's examine our hearts by what comes out of our mouths and respond accordingly. Amen.