

Using Our Words

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: James 3:1-12

This lesson is the fifth in a series on the book of James. In this passage, we find instructions about the words that we use. Much harm can come from our speech. Furthermore, the tongue cannot be tamed. Yet there is a way to ensure that our words are pure.

Warning about Becoming Teachers (v. 1-2)

- James began with a warning about becoming teachers (v. 1) – KJV uses the word masters; the word means “an instructor” (Strong’s); “teaches concerning the things of God” (Thayer)
- This is not to discourage teaching – all Christians are to teach (1 Peter 3:15; Hebrews 5:12); instead, this is a warning for us to recognize the seriousness of it and not take it lightly; teachers incur stricter judgment from God (judging our words, motives, etc.) and from others (trying to find hypocrisy in us)
- “We all stumble in many ways” (v. 2) – this is a reality (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8); again, this is not to say we shouldn’t teach, but we must take care not to discredit the message (2 Corinthians 6:3)

The Power of the Tongue (v. 3-6)

- James used a couple of illustrations to demonstrate the power of the tongue – putting a small bit into a horse’s mouth enables one to direct the horse (v. 3); a small rudder is able to change the direction of a great ship (v. 4)
- The tongue is a small part of the body (v. 5) – it can seem insignificant; it is tempting to speak without giving much thought to what we say (cf. Matthew 12:36; James 1:19; Proverbs 26:18-19)
- Another analogy for the tongue is a fire – a great forest is set aflame by a small fire (v. 5-6); our words can be used to destroy our neighbor (Proverbs 11:9); our words can separate close friends (Proverbs 16:27-28); “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21); we must be careful with our speech

The Tongue Cannot Be Tamed (v. 7-8)

- Man has been placed over God’s creation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6) – animals can be tamed in order to be used by man
- However, the tongue cannot be tamed – this does not mean we cannot help but to lie, swear, gossip, or commit other sins of the tongue; but it means we must address the source of our words; otherwise we’re fighting a losing battle

The Source of Our Words (v. 9-12)

- If the tongue cannot be tamed, how do we control our speech? – we need to make sure that the source producing our words is pure; James only implied the point here, but Jesus was more clear; the source is the heart (Matthew 12:34)
- Too often, the same mouth utters blessing and cursing (v. 9-10) – this should not be; it happens because the heart has not been fully given to the Lord and purified by His word
- Illustrations used to make this point (v. 11-12) – a fountain cannot produce fresh and bitter water because it all comes from a common source; a fig tree cannot produce olives or a vine produce figs because they have the same root; salt water cannot produce fresh water because salt water is the source
- A corrupt heart cannot be tamed to produce good words – so watch over your heart (Proverbs 4:23)

Conclusion

- We need to appreciate the seriousness of the responsibility to teach – do so properly
- We need to recognize the power of our words – speak what is helpful and not harmful
- But all of our efforts are in vain if our heart is not right – let's make sure our heart is right before God