

Title: REDEEMING THE TONGUE, JAMES 1:1-12  
(Chatham, NJ; 09/13/15, AM) [S-P, Topical]

Theme: James' negative assessment of human speech must be tied to an even larger goal of learning how to use our tongue effectively and profitably.

Purpose: To learn how James' insights can lead to a more positive use of words.

Introduction:

1. Speech is important to James (1:19, 26).
2. In 2:15-16 he addresses the problem of words not accompanied by action.
3. Words express emotion, thought, and aspirations.
4. They separate us from the rest of the animal kingdom who can't think in the abstract, communicate poetically, or reflect on the meaning of life.
5. Words make us able to do that.
6. Words carry meaning in ways that the literal expression may not: "Indian summer."
7. Both James and the Book of Proverbs warn us about using our speech for good, not evil.
8. This is not just an issue for Christians but for all mankind.

I. Outline of Ideas, James 3:1-12

- A. The tongue steers the ship, 1-5
  1. First he warns the audience about the pitfalls of being a teacher, 1
  2. Like a small rudder, 4
  3. Where would a ship be without one of those?
  4. Today he might use the analogy of a car's steering wheel.
  5. Oddly, he provides the image of the perfect man, 2
  6. But the perfection begins with controlling the tongue: it leads to control over the rest of the body
  7. The tongue is a powerful little element of our human anatomy.
- B. A dangerous, deadly weapon, 5b-8
  1. "A fire . . . set on fire by hell" 6
  2. Full of unrighteousness
  3. A stain on the entire body
  4. Though some wild animals can be tamed, the tongue cannot
  5. It is restless and full of poison
  6. After reading all that, I feel afraid to open my mouth!!
- C. Look to the source to find the problem (Is this a hint of a solution?), 9-12
  1. Blessings and curses come from the same mouth: we bless God and curse people made in the image of God, 9
  2. His words could not be more ironic: blessing God while cursing his likeness
  3. Of figs, olives, and grapes: each cannot produce the other, 12
  4. The spring: fresh and salt water can't come from one source, 11
  5. A salt pond can't produce fresh water, 12
  6. The contradiction of these things makes the blessings and curses unnatural and even perverted
  7. By implication, the problem isn't the tongue but the source that fuels the tongue

II. How to Redeem the Tongue

- A. Make the spring fresh
  1. James will discuss what's inside a person when he discusses God's wisdom versus the devil's wisdom in the next section
  2. Jesus addresses the problem in Matthew 12:33-37

3. Make the tree good if you want the fruit to be good, 33
  4. The religious leaders were incapable of speaking good because there was so much evil in their hearts, 34
  5. Here is the key: "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks," 34
  6. A good person brings forth good; an evil person evil
  7. Note also the power of judgment when it comes to our words, 37
  8. Wisdom from God makes our inner man good, Proverbs 3:5-7
  9. James 1:5 encourages his listeners to acquire it (portions of Proverbs 2:1-15)
- B. Practically speaking, we begin with "Be quick to listen," James 1:19
1. We might say, "Start the engine of your brain before you put your tongue in gear."
  2. Listen to the wisdom of God from the Book of Proverbs:
    - Without comment, there is great benefit in hearing these.
    - 10:19
    - 15:28
    - 16:23
    - 17:27-28
    - 18:13
    - 21:23
    - 29:20
- C. Bless, don't curse
1. Notice three of the six things that God hates in Prov. 6:16-19: lying, false witnesses, and sowing discord all involve our tongue
  2. Blessing rather than cursing is implied by James and affirmed in 1 Peter 3:9-12 where he also affirms what kind of life God rewards
  3. Gracious and helpful speech encouraged by Paul in Ephesians 4:29 & Col. 4:6
  4. Wisdom from Proverbs tells us that words can do much good:
    - 10:11, 21, 31
    - 12:18
    - 15:1, 4
    - 16:24
    - 25:11-12, 15

Conclusions:

1. Only the Gospel can cleanse our conscience of careless words: in baptism we are washed clean of sin.
2. Only the grace of God can sanctify the human heart and make changes in us.
3. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can lead us to use our words wisely.
4. If you have a need today, let us know.