

Bridle Your Tongue (James 1:22-26)

Expository Lessons from the Letter of James

I. Introduction and Review

- a. This is an extremely *practical letter* to help Christians who are striving to follow the way of life laid out by Jesus.
- b. In the prior messages we discussed:
 - i. Why this letter was so disparaged by Martin Luther, the founding father of modern Protestantism. Luther said things like:
 1. “St. James’ epistle is really *an epistle of straw*...it has nothing of the nature of the gospel in it.”
 2. “Someday I will use James *to fire my stove*.”
 3. “[The epistle of James] has *no value*.”
 - ii. In the previous lesson, James called us all to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (**James 1:19**).
 - iii. Based on the topics James covers, the churches he was addressing clearly had a number of problems. They clearly were not ideal or perfect churches (similar to the church in Corinth that Paul addresses in **1 Corinthians**, or most of the seven churches of Asia Minor that Jesus spoke of in **Revelation 2-3**).
 1. When we see problems in the church in our own day, we should not be surprised or lose faith. Living righteously has always been a challenge, from the beginning.
 2. Rather than get discouraged, we should pay attention to the instructions given and address the problems.
 3. Satan is real, and he is at war with Christians at all times. There will always be sinful people in the church who need to repent (that includes us as well, sometimes).

II. James Taught the Same Thing that Jesus Did

- a. James’ letter was denigrated by Martin Luther. Modern Protestants often struggle with the apparent contradictions they see between the teachings of Paul and James.

- b. However, there are two things to keep in mind.
 - i. As we will see going through this letter, James is teaching the same things that Jesus taught. While his language and examples may be his own, all his main points are completely consistent with what Jesus Himself taught in the gospels.
 - ii. In my opinion, where some might see James and Paul in contradiction, it seems to me that in those cases, they are simply *addressing different topics*. Both of them teach what Jesus taught.
 - 1. Hence, there are no contradictions between James and Paul.

III. Don't Just Hear the Word; Do What It Says

- a. Read **James 1:22-25**.
 - i. If we only listen to the word of God but don't do what it says, we will be deceiving ourselves.
 - ii. After we hear or look into the "perfect law of liberty," we need to do what it says and persevere in that. Note that the Christian way of life is not "lawless" (without laws/commands).
 - iii. We must not forget what we heard or saw.
 - iv. It is the one who *does what it says* who will be blessed.
- b. **Question:** Did Jesus ever give a warning or teaching like this? If so, where?
 - i. In the closing words to His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:
 - 1. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'
 - 2. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, *and does them*, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.
 - 3. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, *and does not do them*, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds

blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”
(**Matthew 7:21–27**, NKJV)

- a. When we pray “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew 6:10**), keep in mind that the will of God refers to *things that He expects us to do* (see **Matthew 7:21**).

ii. From Jesus’ teaching on the Vine and Branches, in **John 15**:

1. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
2. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
3. “*If you keep My commandments*, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (**John 15:5–10**, NKJV)

iii. Other teachings of Jesus on this point include:

1. “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. *Which of the two did the will of his father?* They said to Him, ‘The first...’” (**Matthew 21:28–31**, NKJV)
2. “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” (**Matthew 28:18–20**, NKJV)

- c. Often, when I first encounter someone who tells me they are a Christian, I will try to determine where they are coming from (what they believe and how they live).

- i. **My Typical Starting Question:** “Do you believe that a person *has to do what Jesus said* (= follow His commands) in order to be saved?”
 1. **Christians from one group** (including many from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Restoration Movement, or Historic Faith) **will likely respond:** “Of course we must! What a dumb question! That’s like asking ‘Who is buried in Grant’s tomb?’”
 2. **On the other hand, Christians from the other group** (including many Protestants) **will likely respond:** “This is a trick question, but I won’t fall into your trap! Since we are saved by God’s grace, which we define as ‘unmerited favor,’ NOTHING we do or don’t do can impact our salvation. It is a gift we accept by faith and cannot lose. To believe that anything I do (obedience) can impact my salvation is, in effect, saying that I am saved by things I do, by my works. That would be rejecting the grace of God!”
 - a. They might respond, “No, it is not necessary to do what Jesus said. Paul told us that we are saved ‘by grace through faith’ (Ephesians 2:8-9), therefore all we have to do is accept this freely given and unmerited gift.
 - b. They might offer that we *should* obey Jesus’ commands out of appreciation for what He did on our behalf (dying on the cross). However, they would add that *our obedience (or disobedience) has nothing to do with whether or not we are saved*, once we accept God’s free gift of salvation.

IV. Bridle Your Tongue

- a. Read **James 1:26**.
 - i. “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not *bridle his tongue* but deceives his own heart, *this one’s religion is useless.*” (**James 1:26**, NKJV)
 - ii. We need to bridle our tongues.
 - iii. If any Christian doesn’t do that, he or she is deceiving themselves, and their so-called “religion” is useless.
 1. You can be attending church regularly, following the outward ‘rules,’ look good, pray, read your Bible, have correct theology, but your religion is USELESS if you don’t control your tongue!

- b. The Scriptures teach that while all sin separates us from God, some sins are more serious than others.
- i. “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” (1 John 5:16–17, NKJV)
 - ii. Consider also **John 19:11** and **1 Corinthians 6:18**, regarding certain specific sins being worse than some others.
 - iii. **Question:** In view of the fact that God considers some sins more serious than others, how do you think He views sins of an unrestrained tongue? As a relatively minor infraction?
 1. In **James 1:26**, James seems to view sins of the tongue as being among the more serious sins.
- c. **Question:** Did Jesus ever teach anything that strong regarding the importance of controlling our tongue?
- i. **Answer:** Yes, He did.
 1. In the Sermon on the Mount, the very first sin He addressed (before lust, restrictions on divorce and remarriage, or nonresistance) was sins of the tongue (angry outbursts against a brother).
 - a. “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But *whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.*” (**Matthew 5:22**, NKJV)
 2. Jesus also addressed sins of the tongue in **Matthew 12**.
 - a. “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that *for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” (**Matthew 12:33–37**, NKJV)

- d. While many Christians may believe that what comes out of our mouths (words of reviling a spouse or another Christian) are relatively minor offenses, that is not how Jesus and James saw it!
 - i. **Challenge:** Put this knowledge into practice. Instead of lashing out with our words/tongues, consider the following.
 1. First, pull the plank out of your own eye.
 - a. “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye;’ and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (**Matthew 7:3–5**, NKJV)
 2. Husbands need to lead in their marriage *by example*. Live in an understanding way with your wives.
 - a. “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,” (**Ephesians 5:23–25**, NKJV)
 - b. The best leaders are those who *lead by the example of their own lives*.
 - i. Jesus modeled this type of leadership for us.
 1. “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and *follow Me*.’” (**Luke 9:23**, NKJV)
 2. “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” (**Luke 6:40**, NKJV)
 - ii. Peter also taught that leaders should be leading *by example*.
 1. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for

dishonest gain but eagerly; *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock....*" (**1 Peter 5:2-3**, NKJV)

- c. Peter calls husbands to live in an understanding way with their wives.
 - i. "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (**1 Peter 3:7**, NKJV)
3. Even if you are not the one sinning, *don't be a stumbling block* to another person, exasperating them and leading them into sin.
 - a. "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." (**Mark 9:42**, NKJV)
 - b. While this was specifically regarding children, the principle behind it is universal. Don't ever become a stumbling block to another person!
4. Even when you are reviled by another Christian, *don't retaliate* with your words. Peter points us back to the example of Jesus on the cross.
 - a. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed." (**1 Peter 2:21-24**, NKJV)
 - b. The Christian life is about following the commandments of Jesus, as well as following His example.
5. Don't make excuses for yourself as to sins of the tongue. Some of the lame excuses I have heard over the years include:

- a. "But James says it is *impossible* for us to tame our own tongues (based on **James 3:6-8**). So why even try?"
 - i. However, those who try to use **James 3** as an excuse (claiming it is impossible) are ignoring what James previously said, in **James 1:26**. In the prior passage, James explained that we **MUST** bridle our tongues... otherwise, *our religion is USELESS!*
- b. "It is because I am a *passionate person*."
- c. "This behavior is normal in my family of origin, or in my culture."
- d. "But you don't understand how badly (and unjustly) I have been treated by this other person."
- e. "I am just 'blowing off steam' and being authentic, expressing 'how I really feel'."

V. Concluding Challenges

- a. Don't just believe the word of God. We have to do what it says. In all areas. Otherwise, we are just deceiving ourselves.
- b. Keep a tight rein on your tongue. If you don't do that, according to James, your religion is useless!
 - i. Jesus also taught that sins of the tongue are very serious matters. According to Him, we will be judged by every careless word. By our words we will either be justified or condemned on the Last Day.
 - ii. Don't attempt to brush this off or make excuses for yourself. This is very important in the eyes of the Lord!