



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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James 1:26 "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."

The subject of the tongue is a major theme in the book of James. The practical, straight forward wisdom mirrors the book of Proverbs in many ways. What we say is a reflection of our attitudes and faith. That's the point of our verse today. A religious man with an uncontrolled tongue has a faith that is doing nothing for him. His religion is worthless.

Worthless things is what we often call "junk." Worthless things are tossed out in the trash. Worthless, as used by James, is describing the benefits that this man gains from his religion. His religion is not helping him, shaping or molding him, defining him. This man is not even living his religion. He is a hypocrite. He says the right words in worship, but his attitude and tongue tell us otherwise. His mouth demonstrates that his heart is empty.

Notice the many references to the unbridled tongue in James:

- The disrespect toward poor Christians
- The lack of mercy towards others
- The cursing of others
- The many quarrels
- Speaking against one another
- Arrogant boasting
- Anger

To bridle something is to control it. The illustration takes us to a person trying to ride a horse. Without a bridle, the horse cannot be turned, stopped or controlled. The rider is at the mercy of the horse. This illustrates the person who does not live by faith. Their faith is not controlling their thoughts and tongue. We witness ugly, mean and hurtful abuse from the tongue. It's one thing for this to come from one who does not know the Lord, but from a Christian? From one who follows Jesus? They never learned that from Jesus.

Some justify saying anything by proclaiming, "I just speak my mind." Well, you shouldn't. Put a bridle on that tongue. Others claim, "The truth hurts." It does, but it doesn't need you to stick a knife into someone's heart.

(OVER)

"I just can't help it, that's the way I am," is a cop out. James is telling us that you can help it. You better help it. Your wicked mind and evil tongue destroy the people that Jesus love and died for. Your loose tongue does not build faith and bring others closer to Christ. It crushes them.

There is a time and a place for confrontational conversations. There is a time and a place to rebuke wrong. Those times are in a spirit of gentleness, offered in love and with the hope of making better, not telling someone off.

What and how we say things can lead to an argument or it can calm nerves. We need to remember this in our marriages. We need to recall this when dealing with kids. Hostile attitudes explode when not governed by faith. Our faith is the difference. Our religion is the difference. Our religion is not worthless. It is the opposite, it is valuable. It is not just a ticket away from Hell. It's not just getting to Heaven. Our faith, our religion, makes a difference in our lives now. One way is how it helps bridle our tongues.

Faith tells us to think before you speak. Faith tells us to consider the best way to say things. Faith invites God into what we are going to say. Faith says speak calmly, not in anger. Faith says look at yourself, you are not perfect. Faith says honor God, even in differences. Faith says help the person out, not destroy him.

What good is your religion doing for you now? Does it help you with your choices, even today? When you pick out a movie, a date, a word to say, a book to read, a person to call a friend, does faith affect those things? It ought to. A profitable religion benefits us. It makes a difference to us. It shows.

The Holy Spirit felt that those early Christians were missing something. The salvation in Christ had not led to a change in attitude and relationship with each other. They were abusing and hurting one another. It doesn't take much of that until a skirmish breaks out. From that, things escalate until an all out war is declared. We see Russia and the U.S. tossing verbal bombs at each other now. Those things can lead to greater and more devastating problems. God knows that. He didn't want that among His people.

Use your mouth wisely. Catch yourself before you say things that you shouldn't. Hold back. That's what a bridle does. Turn the conversation into something positive, that's what a bridle does. Find areas that build up. Encourage. Compliment. Thank. Forgive. Help. The bridle will take you to those places when faith is at the reins.

The saddest thing about a worthless religion is that it doesn't take a person to Heaven as one thought. The deceived person spent a life chasing something that did nothing for him. His language, his ways, his attitude, especially at home, was rough, godless, selfish and mean. Gossip, prejudice and judgmental statements are common to a worthless religion. Such a person dies, thinking Heaven is his, when it's not. His religion fooled him. He lived without bridles. He allowed uncontrolled thoughts to become uncontrolled actions and words. He didn't honor God in his words or life. He dies deceived. His poor family suffered through years of this junk. His children, most likely, will have nothing to do with religion because of the worthless example they saw in dad. It didn't do him any good. His legacy will be crippled hearts that were subject to his uncontrolled anger, abuse and godless tongue. He dies, not in glory, but in shame. He awakens on the other side, not in comfort, but in torment. He has fooled even himself. The only one not fooled was God.

Is your faith doing you any good? Does it show today? Are you a person under control? Do you have your bridle in place? That's the thought that James is driving at.

What a wonderful thing faith is, when it is locked into Jesus Christ and filling the heart that manifests it.

Valuable or worthless? What is it to you?

Roger Shouse

