

## Do You Think You're Religious? James 1:26

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Spoonerisms

1. Rev. William Spooner was a minister in Oxford, England at the turn of the century.
2. Rev. Spooner had a unique claim to fame – He was a master at *butchering* the English language!
  - a. truly!
  - b. you see, he had the unusual habit of switching the initial consonants of words so that the new construction was hilarious!
3. Spooner was an intelligent man, but his mind was too quick for his tongue and he would often say things that sounded absent-minded.
4. For instance, he once reprimanded a student at Oxford for lighting a fire in the quad by saying "You were caught fighting a liar in the quadrangle."
  - a. meaning to berate a student for missing a history lecture, he said, "You hissed my mystery lecture."
  - c. this same student had already wasted two terms, so Spooner added in disgust, "You have tasted two worms."
5. Once during a toast to Queen Victoria he uttered: "Three cheers for our queer old dean!"
6. During WWI he reassured his students, "When our boys come home from France, we will have the hags flung out." (Flags hung out)
7. In a public speech in which he praised Britian's farmers, he meant to say they were "noble sons of toil, but it came out as "noble tons of soil."
8. Spooner's goofs in giving devotions at the Oxford chapel were legendary.
  - a. instead of saying, "Our Lord is a loving Shepherd, it was "Our Lord is a shoving leopard."
  - b. can you just imagine those poor students that were supposed to remain serious in the face of this kind of thing!
  - c. he once quoted I Corinthians 13:12 as, "For now we see through a dark, glassly..."
  - d. officiating at a wedding, he prompted a hesitant bridegroom,

- "Son, it is now kisstomary to cuss the bride."
- e. and to a stranger seated in the wrong place: "I believe you're occupewing my pie. May I sew you to another sheet?"
9. But Spooner's most well known gaffs were these . . .
- a. in speaking to a large crowd, meaning to say, "Which of us has not felt in his heart a half-formed wish," ended up with a "half-warmed fish?"
  - b. at a naval review Spooner marveled at "this vast display of cattle ships and bruisers."
  - c. to a school official's secretary he asked: "Is the bean dizzy?"
  - d. and visiting a friend's country cottage which he thought was a cozy little nook, he said: "You have a nosey little crook here."
10. Rev. Spooner wasn't the only person to make verbal gaffs, but he was certainly the most notable, and so his name came to be associated with these kinds of mix ups.
11. Today, the dictionary calls a "spoonerism" any unintentional mixing of sounds that results in a different meaning for the words.
12. What's interesting about Spooner, is that he was *unaware* of the gaffs!
- a. he knew what he wanted to say and thought he had said it.
  - b. others had to tell him his mistakes and switches.
  - c. and when they did, he was inclined to think they were pulling his leg.

## **B. Speech**

1. We're taking a look at our speech today.
2. Unlike Spooner, we need to be *aware* that our speech is a reflection and expression of the sincerity of our faith in God.

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. V. 26**

**26 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.**

1. I've said this before, but it is especially true with this verse –
2. Do I really need to say anything more?
3. This verse is it's own sermon and I probably don't need to add one

thing to it!

4. We could very easily just bow our heads, say the final prayer and go home!
5. This verse simply slays me and I cry out – Change me Lord!

### **B. Dig**

1. Let's make sure we understand what James is saying here.
2. The word translated "*religious*" refers to the outward practice and ceremony of religious worship.
  - a. it was that part of religious service that was concerned with rituals and traditions
  - b. the forms that a person used when they approached their god
  - c. we could think of this in terms of *piety* or *devotion*
3. The man or woman James is referring to here is the one who *thinks* they're pious because they observe the *forms* of religious devotion.
  - a. in a modern setting, we could say they go to church somewhat regularly
  - b. they know the routine of when to stand and sit.
  - c. they even put something in the offering
  - d. they know most of the songs and may even raise their hands now and again when they like the song or feel especially moved.
4. This is the person, who if asked by their peers at work would even dare to say, "I consider myself a religious person" and mean it sincerely *all because* they go to church and know the routine.
5. But James gives a test here to determine if they're genuinely religious or if they are in fact just fooling themselves.
6. He says – "You think you're religious? Check it out – do you bridle your tongue? If you don't, you're only kidding yourself about your piety. Religious practice that doesn't affect your speech is good for nothing."

### **C. Our Speech**

1. James has a lot to say about speech in this letter - 5 times he refers to the tongue!
2. Jesus often spoke of our words and how they reflect what's in our hearts.
3. The Apostle Paul repeatedly returned to this and said genuine faith

reveals itself in a change in the way we communicate.

4. In Matthew 12:34-37 Jesus said . . .

**34 . . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

**35 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.**

**36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.**

**37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

5. When I want to check the oil in my car, I pop the hood and pull out the dip-stick.
  - a. the level of oil on the stick tells me the level of oil in the engine.
  - b. I can't actually see the oil inside the oil pan – but the gauge of the dip-stick is an accurate indication.
  - c. Jesus is saying that we can't see what's in a person's heart – but their speech is the dipstick that reveals what's there.
  - d. if a person is walking in the Spirit, their speech will be sweet and proclaim life.
  - e. if a person is walking in the *flesh*, their speech will be carnal and selfish and spread trouble and strife.
6. When I read what James wrote and Jesus said, I immediately ask, “But what about those who seem pious one minute and then turn right around and their speech runs to trouble?”
7. Okay – let me be honest – I'm referring to myself!
  - a. how is it that I can be so sincere in worship and prayer
  - b. how is it that I can stand up here and proclaim God's Word with such sincerity and the sense of God's presence and power,
  - c. and then an hour later say something so wrong and critical? What's going on?
8. Or how about this –
  - a. how is it that I can look at the members of my family; my wife and children and feel such an overwhelming sense of love and

- loyalty to them,
- b. and try to express it by telling them I love them, and even in the act of saying it, the words seem to fall so utterly short of what I really feel –
  - c. and then the very next day, I’m critical and harsh and saying things that make them feel like scum?
9. When I read James – it slays me!

**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.**

- a. I feel like a fake, a fraud!
- b. with Paul I cry out, “O wretched man that I am.”
- c. who will deliver me from this wicked unbridled tongue?

#### ***D. The Bridled Tongue***

1. That word “bridle” means to place a bit in the mouth.
  - a. it speaks of control
  - b. when you ride a horse, you put a bit in its mouth so that by pulling on the reins, you can control the speed and direction of your mount
2. In v. 26 James speaks of the person whose tongue is like *an unbridled horse*.
  - a. he exerts no *restraint* on his speech.
  - b. she just let her mouth give expression to whatever words come to mind.
3. And therein lies the danger – for the mind, even of the most holy person, is tempted to turn to avenues of thought that are not of God.
4. It’s at that moment – when we’re tempted to entertain evil, that we are faced with a *choice*
  - a. we can either follow through and pursue the thought
  - b. or we can resist and turn to the Lord.
5. Growing in Christ means developing the *habit* of subjecting every thought to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit.
6. Before I speak, I ask, is this profitable.
7. What will be the effect of saying this? Where will these words lead me and those who hear them?

## **E. Chapter 3**

1. In ch. 3, James goes on to elaborate on the tongue . . .

### **2 For we all stumble in many things.**

- a. James is not unrealistic in his expectations - he knows that Christians sin!
- b. he is not demanding some kind of sinless perfection of them
- c. but there must be *progress toward holiness* – and no where is that progress more evident than in the nature and character of our speech . . .

**If anyone does not stumble in word, [in what he says] he is a perfect [spiritually mature] man, able also to bridle the whole body.**

- d. in other words, if a person has their speech under control, they probably have a pretty good handle on the other areas of their life as well
- e. disciplined speech is evidence of a well-ordered life.
- f. then he gives an example . . .

### **3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.**

### **4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.**

### **5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!**

- g. the bit in a horses mouth is tiny – but look at the power it can control!
- h. a massive ship like an oil tanker is steered by a relatively tiny piece of metal.
- i. and it only takes a minute spark to start a huge forest fire!
- j. one cigarette butt flung out the window of a passing car – and a week later, a hundred thousands square miles are a smoking ruin
- k. in the same way, the tongue is a tiny part of the body – but its power is disproportionate to its size

- l. for the tongue can form words that start wars, ruins lives, destroy reputations, dishearten, crush, even kill.
  - m. all of us here this morning know people whose lives have been dramatically changed because of some malicious gossip or harsh word
  - n. some of us here this morning have been on the receiving end of such speech, while others have dished it out
2. Look at v. 6 . . .

**6 And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.**

**7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.**

a. and now James gets to the heart of the matter . . .

**8 But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.**

**9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.**

**10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.**

**11 Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening?**

**12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.**

b. James's argument seems a bit confusing because in vs. 9 & 10 he says that we do both bless and curse out of the same mouth

c. then in vs. 11 & 12 he says this is *impossible* and uses a couple illustrations from nature to prove it.

- 1) a fig tree produces figs – not olives.
- 2) a grapevine gives grapes, not figs!
- 3) a spring is either bitter or sweet but it can't be both.
3. His point is that it's against *nature* for those who have been born again to speak as if they weren't.
4. James is agreeing with us that there's a tension between what is & what ought to be in the Christian life.
5. And the resolution to this tension does not lie in ourselves and our own power to change.
6. A bridled tongue does *not* come by making personal resolutions and vows to do better.
7. Look at v. 8 – **“But no man can tame the tongue.”**
  - a. in v. 7, James said man is able to tame just about every creature in nature
  - b. but he cannot tame himself!
  - c. if you go to the circus you will see all kinds of exotic and ferocious animals mankind has tamed; lions, tigers, leopards, elephants
  - d. at Sea World event the creatures of the deep have been tamed and trained; dolphins, killer whales, sea lions, even sharks
  - e. but man can't tame himself – and the most obvious proof of this is in the realm of speech.
8. So, if no man can tame the tongue – what's the solution?
9. We must turn our tongue over to God – we must surrender it to Him – and in doing so, we immediately find the control over our speech we're looking for.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. How?

1. Now, how do we do that? How do I “turn my tongue over to God”?
2. That sounds so pious – so religious!
3. I realize the truth of it but HOW?
4. Remember what James said?
  - a. a spring is either sweet or salty
  - b. decide what kind of a spring *you* are and then BE IT.
  - c. a fig tree produces figs; a vine, grapes

- d. we must stop and consider - am I lost or saved?
  - e. if I'm saved – then I need to BE what I am!
  - f. I need to be that as I open my mouth and give voice to what's inside me.
5. Being a Christian means choosing *always* to yield to God, including in the selection of the words I speak.
  6. James's challenge is as simple as calling us to be what we are.

## ***B. What We Are Saying About Ourselves***

1. In Romans 10:10, Paul says this . . .

**With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.**

2. It's the stated confession of our mouths that gives expression to the faith in our hearts and sees that faith blossom into the full flower of salvation.
3. We need to understand that EVERY time we open our mouths, we're airing out the contents of our hearts!
4. Your words, my words, are a confession of who and what we are!
5. Think about that before you speak – Every word is a confession of who and what you are!
6. If you're a Christian, then you're *surrendered* to God.
7. Every word you speak ought to be a *reaffirmation* of that surrender.
8. The piety God desires is not *religious ceremony* – Rather, *every word is a sacrifice* rendered to God.