

BOOK OF JAMES
BE CAREFUL HOW YOU TEACH
JAMES 3:1-2

Introduction

There are some great truths found in this chapter of Scripture!

No doubt there have been times when **each of us, at some time or another, has wished that we could take back something we said—Am I right?**

In this chapter, James reminds us that **our words can be some of the most powerful forces in the world! Words can set the course of individuals or even nations for that matter!**

Illustration—During WWII soldiers were warned not to speak freely back home about what was going on in the war. An official Army memo contained ten specific things soldiers needed to be careful talking about. These words were added at the end of the memo: *“loose talk is direct delivery to the enemy. If you come home during war your lips must remain sealed and your written hand must be guided by self-imposed censorship. This takes guts. Have you got them or do you want your buddies and your country to pay the price for your showing off? You’ve faced the battle front; its little enough to ask you to face this ‘home front.’ Remember Loose Lips Might Sink Ships!”*

James 3:1-12 is God’s memo to Believers warning us of the danger of misplaced words in the Body of Christ. In the Church loose lips may not sink ships **but they can make shipwreck of people’s lives!**

We need to realize that words have the power either to do great harm or to do great good! So tonight, let’s begin to consider what God has to say to us about the way we speak. (I say begin because, Lord willing, we’ll spend a few weeks here! But it should be time well spent!)

I. THE WARNING! (Vs 1)

James 3:1 begins with a warning to those who **speak** in the Church. He calls them **“masters”** here...a word meaning *“a teacher or instructor.”* The word or title **“master”** was used of our Lord Jesus Christ 40 times in Scripture! After all **HE WAS AND IS THE MASTER OF INSTRUCTION** or the **MASTER TEACHER!**

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Understand that **teaching or instructing** was a highly valued and respected profession in the Jewish culture. (e.g. **Pharisees/Scribes; also, when Nicodemus came to Jesus in John 3:1-2 and said “Rabbi (which means “Master”)** *we know that thou art a teacher come from God.”*

So, there were many Jews who, when they embraced Christianity, wanted to become **teachers!** And **that was and is a great aspiration!** **After all a teacher is one whose job it is to edify others by giving them a clearer understanding of God's Word.**

However, **the person that desires to be a teacher or that becomes a teacher must realize that there is also GREAT RESPONSIBILITY that comes with teaching!**

That’s because **the words of the teacher can affect folks lives, especially their “spiritual lives”!** (I know this to be personally true from those **teachers** whom I have sat under as well as those who have sat under my **teaching!** I am the product of many **teachers!**)

In Old Testament times the Levites were the ones who had this responsibility:

Nehemiah 8:7-8 “the Levites...caused the people to understand the law...8 So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

A **teacher** then, is supposed to be one who clearly explains the Word of God. Thank God for all the **good teachers** and **good teaching** that **lead folks in the right direction!** Because there are also a lot of **false teachers** and **false teaching** that **lead folks in a wrong direction!**

Now, this passage is **not** saying there shouldn’t be any **teachers** in the Church. Instead **it is a warning against rushing to make ourselves and others teachers** because of the **great responsibility that comes with it!**

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And while we are at it, understand that **we should all seek to be great learners first** so that we can **be the right kind of teachers!**

And also remember, we teach with our **example** in addition to our **words!** Sometimes what we **DO** speaks so loud that folks can't hear what we are saying!

The last phrase there in *verse 1* should give *teachers* great pause to consider—We *teachers* are going to be judged in a greater way because of our *teaching* and the influence we have had on others!

THE WARNING...

II. THE WISDOM! (Vs 2)

A. We Have A Common Problem!

In many things we find that we “offend” or transgress against others don’t we!

That’s especially true with our words! When it comes to *words*, it is so easy to “*offend*” or transgress against others in many things. **Sometimes it is when our words are misunderstood or taken in some way we didn’t intend... Have you ever tried to help with your words and it was taken the wrong way?**

I have a saying for that:

“I know you understand what you think I said, but I’m not so sure that what you heard is exactly what I meant to say!”

We all sin with our words at some time or another!

The verb “*offend*” is in the present tense here meaning that “*we keep on offending.*” The “*we*” is plural, meaning that “*we all keep on offending.*” **Can I get a witness?**

And of all the besetting sins there are, **we most commonly offend in the way we speak to one another!** James focuses on how we need to **strive not to offend in word!** (Vs 2)

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Scripture often sees the mouth as revealing the sin that is within...i.e. our sinful nature! Look at *Matthew 15:10ff.*

Get the picture here. The Pharisees had a problem with Jesus’ disciples not washing their hands according to the elaborate washing procedures laid down by the Pharisees before they ate.

So Jesus had just rebuked the Pharisees for holding to their traditions while ignoring the weightier matters of the actual law!

After doing so, Jesus addressed the crowd that had gathered in *Matthew 15:10-12* and then he explained to his disciples what he meant down in *Matthew 15:16-20.*

Listen, we are **ALL** still sinners even after we’re saved! And a lot of that sin that is within us usually winds up manifesting itself in the words that come out of our mouth!

A person that has learned to control his mouth shows his spiritual maturity by that control!

James is so concerned with the power of our words that he mentions the matter in every chapter of this short book! (**James 1:19, 26; 2:12; 3:1-12; 4:11; 5:12.**)

You may be thinking, “*I’m not worried because I’m not a teacher.*” But, the truth is, we are all teachers in some respect! Parents teach their children. Grandparents teach their grandchildren! Sometimes we are teaching and we don’t even know it! (Where did they get that from?)

Most every time we open our mouths out in the world we are teaching the world what we think of God and our fellow man. Such a knowledge should produce a certain humility in all of us!

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And remember what Paul said about our behavior in the assembly in *Colossians 3:16* *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; **teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

When we speak we should NOT be self-promoting..we should NOT be seeking to look important because of our words.

But rather, when we speak, we should realize that we are open to the same failings and failures as those who hear us.

We Have A Common Problem...

B. We Should Have A Common Goal!

This wisdom about words should give each of us believers a common goal.

We should all be working to become a perfect or mature man or woman, who is able to bridle not only our tongue, but our whole body. All of us should be aiming for that maturity in our lives of having a tamed tongue!

If we are having trouble coming to that maturity we can know that we are in some pretty good company! (Amen?) Many great saints before us have struggled with their tongue and the words they said.

Job was a righteous man but after hearing from the LORD he said to the LORD in: *Job 40:4* *“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.”*

The Prophet Isaiah was a great servant of God but as he had his vision of the LORD high and lifted up, He said:

Isaiah 6:5 *“...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”*

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Simon Peter loved Christ, but when he needed to take a stand, then he denied Him with an oath. And by doing so, he almost shipwrecked his own life! But Jesus got him back on track in John 21 and he began to use his words to testify of Christ and God was able to use him in a mighty way!

Through God’s power we must learn to “*bridle*” or control our words. The tense of the verb “*bridle*” indicates we must once and for all learn how to control our tongues.

This is one of the greatest battles we face as believers—To guard our own heart and the words that come to our lips from our heart! Our prayer (goal) should be as the Psalmist David in: *Psalm 19:14* *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Conclusion

So as we contemplate just these first two verses this chapter this evening...

Have you submitted your words to the Lordship of Christ today?

Did you know that the health of Christ’s Church depends on it!

How many people are out of Church today just because someone else couldn’t bridle their tongue!?

Not only does the health of Christ’s Church depend on it, but the souls of lost men depend on it!

How many people won’t even listen to the Gospel today because someone who should have known better used their lips or lived their lives contrary to what they should have?

Remember loose lips can shipwreck lives!