



# HG21: James 4/6 'Taming The Tongue'

James 3:1-18

## Home Group Sermon Notes

25th October 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

**A Warning to Teachers, vs1:** In the early church teachers were really important because whilst the apostles and prophets travelled the country and didn't stay in one place for long the teachers were the ones who stayed with a particular church, they led the congregation, new converts were placed in their care and they had the job of nurturing their young faith and teaching the truth about the gospel. Congregations were influenced by their style, their prejudices and their interpretation and we see how things could go wrong where some tried to introduce circumcision and the keeping of the law thus making Christianity another kind of Judaism. In Philippians Paul pleads with the young church and so with us, to have the attitude of Christ. Christ was humble, Christ came to serve. Paul encouraged them to consider others better than themselves, to do away with self importance, selfish ambition and self centeredness yet the very ones who led the young church were in danger of living in contradiction to all this teaching and ran the risk of becoming spiritual tyrants, or spiritual big heads. Some may have enjoyed too much, the respect and admiration offered to them by their members, traps the present day teacher can of course still fall into.

**Two kinds of Wisdom, vs13-18:** James reinforces this point when he challenges anyone who considers themselves wise to live graciously and gently, proving that any good deeds they do come from the gentleness and humility in their hearts. Wise teachers will be more aware of what they don't know as opposed to what they think they do know. Leaders who grasp arrogantly at power and display selfish ambition, jealousy and boastfulness simply prove that they are living in contradiction to what they teach and their source of wisdom is not God. They may be clever and know much but rather than bringing people together and building up the community they drive people apart, resulting in disorder instead of peace and harmony. True wisdom comes from God and is pure, generous and free from ulterior motives. Worldly wisdom is selfish and only ends up hurting others. **Teachers must be very careful to avoid 2 great dangers:**

1. What they teach must be the truth and not simply their own opinions or prejudices
2. Their lives must reflect their teachings, people must be able to see that they are living out what they preach. All of us in any kind of leadership position must be careful of what we say and how we conduct ourselves, and ask ourselves the questions, how does what we say affect the people we lead, and what impression does the way we live our lives give other people?

**"... speak no evil" vs3-6:** Of course its not just the teachers and leaders who are tempted and go on to sin; every Christian must admit that "we all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2). The tongue certainly causes us to stumble. All too often we can be a bit self righteous, making a big deal about not swearing, but this isn't what James is getting at, if only it was that easy... no James is talking about the use of our speech against other people. Was it Thumper who said to Bambi or Bambi who said to Thumper, "If you cant say anything nice don't say anything at all." Today where would reality TV be without the sharp and sometimes brutal opinions of celebrity judges? Currently the 2 top TV programmes at the weekend X Factor and Strictly Come Dancing rely heavily on the critical and often cruel language of the panel of judges. But James here encourages us to do as Thumper and Bambi suggest and if you cant say anything good about someone or encouraging about something, then just keep quiet because control of the tongue is a sign of spiritual maturity, and who of us here can say that we never stumble over this, letting ourselves and God down, I know I do.

James gives us 3 illustrations to get his point over, he uses a horse's bit, a ships rudder and a forest fire. The bit allows a rider to control the animal and harness its power for productive work or sport. A rudder enables the sailor to use the power of the wind to steer and direct, both are small in comparison to what they control. And of course fire, so useful yet so destructive and dangerous that even a little wayward spark of it can decimate an entire forest. Just as a fire can start as a small spark somewhere deep in a forest yet spread to reach houses and property miles away, so what we say is wide ranging, what we say can damage at a distance, gossip can start locally but like a fire spread, a forest fire is tremendously difficult to bring under control, similarly, there is nothing as difficult to kill as a rumour. Fire burns and fire hurts, our words can also burn and hurt. The small tongue has power to accomplish great things yet can be uncontrollable with potential for both good and evil.

I expect that like me your mum taught you that little phrase "*sticks and stones may hurt my bones but words can never hurt me.*" You may have used it in the playground at school, but we all know that that is just not true, it wasn't true in the playground when other kids said things that stung and hurt, may still hurt even now, and its even less true when we are all grown up. We can kid ourselves by thinking that what we say has very little importance, but the truth is that the way we use our words will affect our lives and the lives of others much more than we realise. If we are always negative about situations or critical of others then we will end up being pessimistic and unsupportive but if we are positive and constructive then not only will we feel better but those around us will be encouraged and we can create a more fertile and healthy place for faith to grow, it is therefore really important that we learn to get control of our speech and use it properly. With the tongue, we can praise God, teach God's Word, express our love for others and lead people to Christ, but we can also tell lies that can hurt someone's character even ruin a reputation, malicious or unkind words can break someone's heart, break their spirit, make it difficult for them to know Christ, to come to church, hinder their service, dent their faith, we can throw in some unkind words into a conversation, we can grumble, discourage, we can tear down and we can do all these things in a seemingly innocent manner, after all we're only trying to help, we're only speaking our mind ... its all said in love.

**There are several methods that we can use to cut people with our tongue here are the 3 most common.**

**1. There's the head on collision:** The things we say that are deliberately said to hurt and a method usually reserved for the people we say we love most, our husbands or our wives, after all, we know what hurts, we know just the right sarcastic tone to use, we know their weaknesses, we know the anniversary they forgot, the time they forgot to phone to say they'd be late. Sometimes these attacks arise because we have a problem with dealing with anger and if that is so, then we need to learn to control it and our priority must be to stop before things get out of control and we say things we regret.

**2. Then there's the constant criticism:** This gnaws away at someone's self esteem. Parents use this method with their children, employers against their employees, teachers with students, you know the sort of thing, nothing is ever good enough; it's only what you did wrong that gets remembered. It must have been commonly used in the early church giving Paul cause to warn the parents in the Colossian church against the danger of exasperating their children so that they lose heart (Colossians 3:21).

**3. Then there's the stab in the back:** When we say something about someone to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party, getting involved in gossip, stuff we just want to get off our chest or maybe its something just so deliciously interesting that you simply cant wait to pass it on, we may even drop their name into a prayer meeting... because of course, our motives are pure... we're just concerned after all. But what our gossip about others does is colour other peoples opinions of the person we're gossiping about, what we say to someone about a 3<sup>rd</sup> party can greatly affect the way the other thinks about that 3<sup>rd</sup> party and if it involves any kind of conflict then people loyal to us will naturally take our side. People's reputations can be at risk from what we say and we can unfairly prevent people from forming their own impressions of others. Being someone who always voices their opinions about others and passes on gossip ultimately can backfire because it leaves you wondering what they are saying about you as soon as you are out of earshot.

**"Help, I need Somebody" vs7:** In Gen 1.28 *"God said Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth"* and so for once we did what we were told, we went on to tame or control any living creature that may be useful to us, however no one will ever, without the help of God be able to tame or control the tongue, its impossible. Only the Holy Spirit can teach us self control and help us to monitor and control what we say, only the Holy Spirit can help us to respond with love to things that are said about us that may offend or hurt us, and only the Holy Spirit can set our tongues on fire like He did at Pentecost and use our tongues powerfully to win the lost for Christ. Its what's in our hearts that's important, for it is *"out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matt. 12:34).

**Double standards vs9-12:** Although we have been made in the image of God we are at times like split personalities, literally two faced. During church we praise God, we open our mouths and our tongues declare our worship of God, we express deep emotions of love and gratitude to God, we receive communion, recite creeds, utter confession, but on the way home what are we saying? Perhaps we pick the service to bits, maybe we didn't like the songs, maybe the talk was too long, we got nothing out of it, or maybe someone cuts you up at a junction on the way home, you're not blessing then are you? The tongue can bless and the tongue can curse, so how are we blessing God and others by what is coming out of our mouths. This is some of the hardest teaching because it is so hard to ensure that what we say is only ever what God would be pleased to hear us say. It may be that some of us have been Christians for so long that we forget that when we accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour something changed inside us, we started on a journey towards sanctification, we are no longer living our lives selfishly for ourselves, Christ lives within us and although we still live in the world we are to live differently, set apart and dedicated to the Lord for His special purpose. We place emphasis on how we can serve God, and tell others about Him but its no good if our tongues are like loose cannons ready to tear down any good work that we or others may be involved in, whether we agree with it or not, and it is simply inappropriate for a tongue that proclaims worship to the Lord to be used to curse and tear down those He loves.

**So what can we do about it?** First thing is acknowledge that there is a problem and seek the help of the Holy Spirit, you may also want to take time out to confess to God about things you may have said to others, or about other to others... this could take a while if we're honest! Perhaps you need God to release you from a general feeling of negativity about things. Negativity wears us and others down and is in direct opposition to Christ who always builds up and encourages.

**1. James tells us the secret: seek God's help:** vs8 *"but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison."* James doesn't say that change is impossible but we cant do this ourselves, we need to surrender our tongues to God, and then be urgent and committed to this and ask for his help daily.

**2. Be ready to listen more and speak less:** James 1:19. *"My dear brothers and sisters take note of this, Everyone should be quick to listen slow to speak and slow to become angry."* In school teachers regularly reminds the children that they have 2 ears and one mouth meaning that they need to listen more and talk less. If that fails I find Abraham Lincoln's advice useful *"It is better to remain silent and be thought of as a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."*

**3. Count to ten:** Don't dive in with your first thoughts in response to what has been said, bite your tongue. James 1 26 *"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep tight rein on his tongue he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."*

**4. Be like Thumper and Bambi:** ... *"if you cant say anything nice"* simply refuse to say anything bad about someone else. Be an encourager, you can speak your thoughts but phrase them in a positive and constructive way, think of Roy and how he always spoke with encouragement. James 4. 11 5. 9 *"Brothers and sisters do not slander one another".... "don't grumble against each other, brothers or you will be judged."*

**And, before you speak, ask yourself:** 1. Do I need to say this or am I simply engaging in gossip? Is what I am going to say helpful, does it encourage or discourage, is it hurtful? If you are tempted to talk about someone to another stop and ask yourself why it is that you would want to pass on this particular information, what is your motive? Is it going to benefit the person you are talking about...or does it make you look good and put the other person in a less favourable light? Is just gossip? 2. Something we all need to remember, - is what you are passing on private? Do you have permission to share it, will any one else be affected by what you are saying.

**"All you need is Love"** At the end of the day in the words of Lennon and McCartney, *"All you need is love."* Love should be at the heart of everything we say and do. If we are secure in the knowledge that we are loved by God and believe that it is His desire to be involved in our lives then we wont be inclined to engage in negativity and gossip and we certainly won't want to do or say anything that could hurt others. If, as Jesus asks of us we love others as ourselves, we will only want the best for them, we will want to make it our aim to build them up, not belittle them. James doesn't want us to simply learn to control our tongues, he wants us to learn to use them creatively and positively and to use them to bless others. We can *all* develop the art of encouragement and bless others with our speech instead of cursing them. Lets agree to use our speech creatively, to rebuke negativity, to recognise others gifts and achievements and to look for, see and express potential.

Lets agree to refrain from gossip, talk less and listen more, to bite our tongues more and count to 10, lets refuse to tear others down, and surrender our tongues to Jesus Christ? God gave us the ability to communicate, in dying for us Jesus communicated our Fathers love for each one of us, lets not taint this gift of language and of His love by cursing the people that He also loves and died for, lets use our tongues to praise Him and to be a blessing to others.

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."* Eph 3:29



# HG21: James 4/6 'Taming The Tongue'

James 3:1-18

## Home Group Discussion Notes

25th October 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

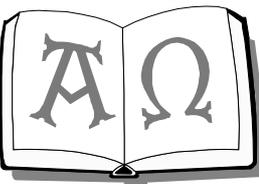
*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

**Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins):** Heather Small's song "What have you done today to make you feel proud?" is often used at achievement ceremonies or at the end of sporting events such as marathons. If we changed the words to "What have you *said* today to make you feel proud?" have we got anything got share?



### Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



### Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1) James places an emphasis on the accountability of teachers but we all stumble in regards to the use of our tongues? How should accountability make us all more careful in the way we use our words?
- 2) Being a Christian isn't so much what you **do** as what you **are**, and what you **are** will manifest itself in what you **do**. So how do you think you affect the people around you, in church and elsewhere, by what you say and how you live your lives.
- 3) Have you ever been burned by the tongue, by what someone has said about you or to you? How has it affected you?
- 4) If anyone will admit to it ... why do we find it so hard to show self-control in our speech at times?

5) Gossip often arises when we disagree with people, when we don't like what they are doing...when we have problems with them. Why is it so hard to confront individuals with behaviour we don't like?

6) When was the last time someone really encouraged you, when was the last time you encouraged and praised someone else?

7) Are you an encourager, if not, why not?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

