

Prayer

Thank You, Lord God, for the little things of life which make our day and give us security in all we do. The love of those who are close to us; the things we do each day for others, and what they do for us; the food we eat, the drinks we enjoy, and the conversations we share each day. May we never stop praising You for the little things that make life good. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Retailing

Pray for those who work in retail trades in your local area, from shops to the selling of food and car parts, for example. Pray for those whose living depends on their success.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the life God has given you, and for His love
- Pray that God's people will show good morality to the world
- Pray for your country's political parties and how they are funded

Meditation

What is magnificent can often let you down;
What is grand may lack essential quality;
What is impressive could hide many faults;
And what is huge may very well fail to last.

Why is it that even though we know these things,
We still glamorise extravagance and size.
How different from what is taught by Christ;
That the poor in spirit possess His Kingdom,

What is ordinary can often be wonderful;
What is simple may be found to be wise;
What is small could be of great importance;
And what is meek will an example to all.

Bible Study - James 1:26,27

²⁶ Whoever thinks they are religious, but deceives the heart by not keeping a tight rein on the tongue, demonstrates religion that is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and untainted before God the Father, is this: to help orphans and widows in their troubles, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Review

James concludes the opening section of his letter with this extraordinary broadside against ungodliness amongst God's people. If we read these two verses together, then his complaint about the church is obvious; he says, 'Restrain your speech and do good deeds'; this sounds like common sense advice rather than spiritual advice, but we would be mistaken. We have already seen that James was crystallising much Jesus' own teaching, so we must now turn to this to gain a better perspective on the teaching of this letter.

If you have read through any of the Gospels, you may be familiar with Jesus' many battles with the scribes, Pharisees and religious authorities of the day. In the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt 6:1-18) He denounced their interpretation of the laws of Moses as pious nonsense. In response, they cornered Him and sought to trick Him with questions into blaspheming against God or breaking the law (Matt 12, 16:1ff, 22:15 etc), and tried to restrain Jesus and limit His influence on the people of Israel and Jerusalem. What we must notice here is that the opposition to Jesus was verbal. Now Jesus taught that words were important and should be used with care, both in prayer (Matt 6:1f.) and in all human affairs, and he demonstrated this Himself in His ministry. He is reported as dealing with a situation 'with a word' (e.g. Matt 8:16) and sometimes reported as remaining silent Himself or asking others to be careful in what they say (e.g. Mark 9:30, 14:61).

It is not surprising therefore that James said in his letter that false teaching, speaking too much and trying to manipulate other people were examples of the unworthy use of the tongue, and He summed this up with the phrase 'keep a tight rein on the tongue' (1:26). James may well have seen how the church could easily be destroyed by the inappropriate use of the tongue by its members! He said that the unrestrained use of the tongue could become a form of deception; how could people who followed Jesus Christ speak in a worldly way, just like those who had hounded Jesus to His death in Jerusalem, using false teaching, evil words, arguments, shouting, intrigue and accusations!

The way we use words differs in each generation, and today, problems arise with the way we encourage people to 'speak their mind'. Unfortunately, with this encouragement, people will quickly express their feelings without careful consideration of the effect of their words on others; and great damage can result, both in the church and outside. Wise considered speech is something to be valued in any culture and in any age.

But after pointing us to the dangers of the tongue, James describes what counted as 'good religion'. For him, 'religion' was a matter of how someone put faith into practice, and it was the proper consequence of someone's salvation to do what was right in God's sight. To this end, he quoted the classic Biblical examples of what God requires of His people; to be concerned for the 'widows and orphans' who were the poor and outcast of ancient society (as in Deut 10:18, Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17 etc. and also Matt 5:3ff, 19:21 etc). James suggests that if the heart is focussed on such things, then the tongue will probably be well disciplined; doing what God requires gives a godly perspective on life, and this shows itself in moderate and considered speech.

There is no escaping the heart of James' challenge, however. We all know well that words often light a fire that cannot easily be extinguished, exacerbating even minor problems. We also know that if our faith has degenerated into a matter of church attendance on Sundays, then we are far away from the practical godliness and discipleship to which we are called, and our speech about God and the church will probably reflect this. How can this be rectified? We can start only by accepting our problems and presenting them to the Lord in repentance. Then we will be in a position to learn from Him and find the discipline to speak in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What impression do you gain of what James calls 'religion' in this passage of scripture?
2. Is it possible to learn to change the way you 'use your tongue'? Why is it so hard to change the way you speak to others? What is involved apart from the tongue?
3. How are you involved in helping the poor of the world? What ought you to be doing to help the poor of the world?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Each of us must watch the way we use our tongues. Few of us will not recall some occasion when we have said something inappropriately and realised it too late. We need help from those who are close to us to make sure that we regularly keep a check on the use of our tongues.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Write down a list of occasions you recall when you think that words someone has spoken have undermined the truth of a situation. How should this be dealt with?*
- *Pray to God for wisdom in speaking the truth at all times, and read again some of the scriptures in this passage to help you understand more about the scripture's advice about the use of the tongue.*

Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Friend, give us peace in the midst of strife, joy in the midst of unhappiness, and grace in the midst of trouble. By this we know your love and affection, and may we never take it for granted. Thank You Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN.