

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Stop Kidding Yourself

James 1:19-27

Part Twelve

The theme of James is “Tests of Living Faith!” This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we are saved. The first test that we find in this epistle is the “The Response to Trials test.” This test is found in **James 1:2-18**. We have now begun to consider the second test which is “The Response to the Word test” in **James 1:19-27**. A proper response to the Word involves a “proper reception” in **VV. 19-21** and a life characterized by “active obedience” in **VV. 22-27**.

As we have explored this area of “active obedience,” we have looked at the “demand for it” in **VV. 22-25** and we are now looking at specific “illustrations of it” in **VV. 26-27**. The very first area that we have looked at is the speech area. Let us look at **V. 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.”** One area that active obedience must be manifested in is the area of our speech; the way we talk. The way we communicate. But if we find ourselves being unchanged by the Word in this particular area, we are in trouble. A religion that does not transform the heart, and thereby the tongue, James tells us, is totally worthless in the sight of God.

What does it mean practically for us to bridle our tongue? Certainly it would involve putting off certain speech patterns while putting on others. Over the past several weeks we have considered certain areas of speech that need to be put off or abandoned. The areas of speech that we mentioned were blasphemous speech, filthy speech, lying speech, complaining speech, boastful speech, angry speech and careless speech. After considering these particular areas of speech, we have begun to consider areas of speech that need to be put on.

To help us in this area I am using an ACRONYM A-C-T-S. As we consider each letter of this ACRONYM, I will make an application to our speech as it applies to God and then I will make a similar application as it relates to man. We began last week by considering the letter A.

The Letter “A”

As it applies to God, the first area of speech that needs to be added is ADORATION. Adoring speech is the outflow of our redeemed spirit contemplating God’s holy perfections addressed to Him in prayer (Ps. 100).

As it applies to man, the first area of speech that needs to be added is APPRECIATION.

Appreciative speech is any speech that communicates to people that we value them for who they are (1 Pet. 2:17)..... WE NOW ARE GOING TO THE SECOND LETTER OF THE ACRONYM.

The Letter “C”

As it applies to God, the second area of speech that needs to be added that begins with the letter “C” is CONFESSION. Confessing speech is any speech directed to God that acknowledges our sin and agrees with Him concerning it.

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As it applies to man, the second area of speech that needs to be added that begins with the letter “C” is conciliatory speech. CONCILIATORY speech is any speech directed to man that seeks to overcome hostility. This morning as we consider this area of conciliatory speech, I would like to look at conciliatory speech as it relates to overcoming hostility directed toward us.

As we explore this very narrow and specific area, let me ask you a question: How do you know or suspect when someone might be hostile toward you? Of course the very easiest way for us to know when someone is hostile toward us is when they come and confront us. But there are other times when it may not be nearly so direct but very indirect. In either case, whether we have come to have this knowledge of someone’s hostility toward us directly or indirectly, the Scriptures are very clear as to what we are to do. And if we are seeking to be obedient to what the Scriptures teach, it will entail us BRIDLING OUR TONGUE.

WHEN HOSTILITY TOWARD US IS DIRECT

I don’t know how often this has happened to you but I would suspect that it has happened on numerous occasions during the course of your life. It begins with children becoming angry with their siblings. I remember, in one of the many fights that I had with my older and bigger brother throwing a pair of scissors at him and breaking the skin on his back in a fit of rage. Then I remember running for my life and locking myself in the bathroom, hoping that his fear of my father would prevent him from breaking the door in. I remember playing basketball pickup games at Leuder’s park in Compton and having the person I was guarding take a swing at me because they thought my defense was overly aggressive. I can remember times in my marriage when Lynn has been angry with me and I know that somehow I had provoked her. As a pastor in this church I have had people angry with me many times. They have expressed that anger toward me personally to my face, in private, in groups, and even in front of the congregation. But one consolation that I have is, I am not alone. I know that you have suffered in the very same way as I have suffered. At some point in your life or at many different points in your life you will have people angry with you who are very willing to tell you so. **AND WHAT WOULD THE LORD HAVE YOU TO DO WHEN YOU ARE CONFRONTED IN ANGER?**

IT BEGINS WITH NOT RETALIATING. In **1 Peter 3:8-12** Peter talks about the good life. And in the midst of this discussion he outlines behaviors that should be pursued in **V. 8**. Then in **V. 9** he begins to outline behaviors that should be avoided. And what does **V. 9** say **“Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”** How are we to respond when we are angrily confronted? First of all, we cannot respond with evil acts. What does it say, **“Not returning evil for evil....”** And we certainly cannot respond with evil speech. For the verse goes on to say, **“or insult for insult.”** The Lord through Peter is calling us to bridle our tongue. And the bridling of our tongue involves not responding in kind when we are angrily confronted.

To engage in a war of words, returning insult for insult, is a very serious matter. People who do this could easily be labeled a “reviler.” A reviler is simply one who speaks abusively. In **1 Cor. 5:11** it says, **“But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater or a reviler**”

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People who make it a practice to be insulting are doing something totally unacceptable for the believer. And it does not lessen the seriousness of our sin if we try and justify it by saying, “I was provoked.” It does not matter that we insulted a particular person only after he insulted us.

If we think that **1 Cor. 5:11** is a strong statement concerning abusive speech he makes an even a stronger statement in **1 Cor. 6:9-10**, **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals (10) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers,.... shall inherit the kingdom of God.** When we are angrily confronted by another person, whether that is our husband, wife, child, parent, employer, employee, friend, neighbor, whoever that might be, we must understand that to respond in kind is totally unacceptable; it is a serious transgression and we must purpose ourselves not to retaliate. WELL, IF WE CANNOT RETALIATE AND RENDER INSULT FOR INSULT THEN WHAT SHOULD WE DO? THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT THINGS THAT WE CAN PURPOSE TO DO.

WE MUST PURPOSE TO CAREFULLY LISTEN TO THEIR ACCUSATION AGAINST US.

What does **Prov. 18:13** tell us? **“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”** This means that we will take time to understand what the specific accusation they are making against us is. And it also means that we need to understand the basis of that accusation. This is not an easy process when dealing with a hostile person, but hopefully it will be a process that although difficult, will be rewarded. HOW COULD CAREFULLY LISTENING TO AN ACCUSATION BRING REWARD?

Hopefully we will be rewarded by a positive impact on the life of the accuser. **Prov. 15:1**, tells us that a **“gentle answer turns away wrath.”** If we are successful by God’s grace in not retaliating when angrily confronted, but strive to calmly and quietly hear what they are saying, certainly this would fall into the category of a gentle answer or response. In doing this, we have the hope that the person’s anger toward us will be abated. Consider **Prov. 25:15**, **“By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone.”** No matter how angry a person is with us, if we maintain a non-retaliatory spirit and pursue the course of listening with a sincere interest to understand his position and the basis of it, the door is opened to the possibility of the person changing their attitude and spirit toward us. BUT THIS MAY NOT BE THE ONLY REWARD.

Hopefully we will also be rewarded with a positive impact on our life as well. I know that there are not many of us in this room this weekend who go around saying to themselves, “What evil act can I perform against such n’ such a person?” or “What hurtful word can I say to such and such a person?” Unless we have been angry or have been personally hurt, I think for the most part we try to be decent to the people that are around us. So it may not be easy for us when angrily confronted by someone to see any personal guilt. But we must not allow ourselves the luxury of thinking that our initial perception of ourselves and our actions is necessarily a correct one. One of the primary means that God uses to expose our sin is through rebuke. Certainly we see this in **Mt. 18:15-20**. And we should not assume that we can be convicted of our sin only by those who come to us out of concern for us. We can also be convicted of sin by those who come to us even in anger. We need to understand this. **Prov. 13:1** tells us that a **“scoffer will not listen to rebuke.”** So let us purpose to listen and perhaps we will be rewarded with a new and better insight into ourselves and our personal sinfulness.

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We are still not done. There is a final step that is crucial when we are responding to someone who is angrily confronting us.

WE ARE TO BLESS THEM. Let us go back to **1 Peter 3:9** and read the verse again. It says, **“not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.”**

What does this mean? What does it mean to “give a blessing?” The root meaning of the greek word means to “speak well of.” We get our English word “eulogy” from this particular Greek word. Therefore when we think in terms of “blessing” someone who is angrily accusing us, we need to think in terms of “speaking well of.” This means we will be seeking to represent our accusers, when possible, in the very best light.

Certainly we can give a blessing to those who accuse us when we are speaking to the Lord. When Jesus was in the process of being crucified and people were mocking Him, what was His response? He prayed in **Luke 23:34**, **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”** He did not represent them to His father in a hateful or vindictive way. No, he represented them in the very best possible light. He represented them as those who did not know what they were doing and he petitioned the Lord on their behalf. We can bridle our tongue by “blessing” those who are verbally attacking us, by praying for them, and in doing this we are giving them a blessing.

Are you doing this? Are you blessing your enemies when you go to prayer by speaking as well as you can of them and seeking the best for them.

We can also “give a blessing” to those who are accusing us by speaking good things about them?

We can do this by speaking directly to them. Consider the story of Mary and Elizabeth in **Luke 1**. The Bible tells us when Mary was pregnant with Jesus that she went to visit Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. And when Elizabeth saw Mary she exclaimed, “Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” What did Elizabeth do? She spoke well of Mary. Or in other words she gave her a blessing. We can do this with those who come to us.

For instance, we can say to them, "I know that you are sincere in what you are saying. I know you would not have come if you did not believe that what you are sharing with me is true. I appreciate that you are willing to speak to me about this rather than sharing it with others or harboring resentment against me in silence." In responding in this way we are giving them a blessing. Why? Because we are speaking well of them.

We can also give a blessing to those who accuse us indirectly when we are speaking to others about them. In the past there have been people that have lashed out at me in anger. On a number of those occasions I believe that those individuals felt that I had provoked them to righteous anger. And there have been occasions when those outbursts have been witnessed. When individuals talked to me about these incidents, I would try and relate to them what I saw which was good about them. And what I saw as good was the fact that though they were angry, I believed that they felt they were in some way serving God’s purposes. I was attempting to bless them even in the midst of something that was making my life very difficult.

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I want to make it very clear that we are not, in an attempt to speak well of someone or to bless them, to lie to them or about them. It just means that we are seeking to find that which is good in them or about them and are seeking to highlight those things in our conversation with them or in our conversations with others when we think it is profitable. Does this mean that we cannot ever share fault or weakness with a person? Of course not. But if we are ever in the process of sharing fault or weakness we should be mindful of the fact that sharing weakness does not have to be to the exclusion of the good things that we see in their life. In fact, it should not be.

Are you doing this? Are you speaking well of those who have caused you difficulty? Not only to the Lord but also to others? Or are you, in anger or in a spirit of retaliation, striking back?

CONCLUSION

As we consider the bridling of our tongue we need to appreciate not only the need to

A - Adore God and appreciate others, but we also need to understand the importance of

C- Confess our sins to God and seek to conciliate the hostility of others toward us.

When anger is expressed to us directly we need to do the following:

We are not to retaliate; rather we are to listen and to bless.....