

How To Sail Through Life
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The sound of the 911 call was frightening last February. A woman screaming for police to bring a gun because her pet Chimp was mauling her friend right before her eyes. On the tape the Chimp's squeals could be heard as the woman screams "He's ripping her apart...he's killed my friend." The 200 pound chimp was finally shot and killed by police. 55 year old Charla Nash is still in critical condition in the Cleveland Clinic today.

July 1 of this year, another call to 911 in Oxford, Florida. A 9 foot Burmese python had strangled a 2 year old girl to death in her bed as she slept. The owner, her mother's boyfriend, also owned a 6 ft. boa constrictor.

- The debate over people owning and trying to domesticate exotic animals has raged for years. It begs the question: "Can you ever really tame a wild animal?"
- As we look at James Chapter 3, once again James gets very practical with several illustrations that make the point just as clearly today as they did when he wrote them in A.D. 50.
- James never saw news video of the Southern California wildfires...but he understood people and the challenge we all face to TAME THE TONGUE and CONTROL OUR BEHAVIOR.

James 3 (New International Version)

James 3:1-18 (Entire Chapter)

Taming the Tongue

- Let's begin with verses 1 and 2 of James Chapter 3:

¹Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

- Now this is an INTIMIDATING WORD for your teacher!
- The teacher will be HELD TO A HIGHER STANDARD.
- It appears that as the early church was growing, people began to want to be teachers but perhaps for the wrong reasons.
- Some might want to be a teacher because this is a "bully pulpit" from which to promote their own agenda or inflate their ego.
- The fact: It's humbling to know that as a teacher I will have to give an account to God whether I handled His Word correctly.

- How does James give your teacher a little encouragement in Verse 2?
 - “We all stumble in many ways.”
- Then he sets up the next section. How does he describe a PERFECT person?
 - “never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man,”
- And what is the result of controlling what we say?
 - “able to keep his whole body in check.”
- A truth: If we could just keep our feet out of our mouth we’d be able to walk the straight path!
- The tongue: A little thing that can be a BIG BLESSING or cause BIG PROBLEMS.
- When we speak we need to SPEAK HARMLESSLY

Let’s read verses 3-6:

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

- What is James’ point when he talks about “bits in the mouths of horses” and the “rudder” on a ship?
 - A little thing (the tongue) can cause BIG EFFECTS both Good and Evil
- Because we probably have more problems with the EVIL the tongue can do, let’s brainstorm a minute.
- What kind of SPEECH can cause damage?
 - Insults
 - Gossip
 - Lies
 - Criticism
 - Negativism
 - Profanity (more to come on that)
- We often cover our INSULTS with rationalizations like these:
 - “I was just kidding.”
 - “I didn’t mean anything by it.”
- By the way, sometimes we ARE JOKING...and that’s okay if you know it’s being RECEIVED as a JOKE.
- What kind of rationalizations do we use to cover our GOSSIP?
 - “I just thought you should know.”
- How about CRITICISM and NEGATIVITY. How do we rationalize that?
 - “I just wanted to help...(inference:by telling you how stupid and idiotic this idea is)...I just want to be a blessing.”
- Like anything it comes down to the MOTIVE and INTENT in our HEARTS.

- But you say, “I REALLY DIDN’T INTEND TO HURT with what I said!”
- Alright Sunday School legal Scholars: What is the difference between HOMICIDE and INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER?
 - Intent
- What’s the *same* about both HOMICIDE and INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER?
 - The person is still dead.
- In any kind of communication: The important thing is not WHAT YOU INTENDED but HOW IT WAS RECEIVED.

Matthew 12:36-37

³⁶But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

- James sums up this section in Chapter 3 verses 7 and 8:

⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Warren Wiersbe said:

James reminds us that animals can be tamed, and, for that matter, fire can be tamed. When you tame an animal, you get a worker instead of a destroyer. When you control fire, you generate power. The tongue cannot be tamed by man, but it can be tamed by God.

- What’s our responsibility according to James: If you’re going to drive a car or handle a gun you need to know how to do so safely.
- The tongue can be a DEADLY WEAPON. We need to know how to use it without doing HARM.
- Not Only Do We Need To Speak HARMLESSLY We Need To Speak CONSISTENTLY
- Let’s look at Verses 9 through 12 of Chapter 3:

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹Can both fresh water and salt^[a] water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

- James uses NATURE to illustrate this concept:
 - A fresh water spring produces fresh water – that’s the nature of a fresh water spring.
 - A salt spring doesn’t produce fresh water – that’s the nature of a salt spring.
 - A fig tree bears figs – that’s the nature of a fig tree.
- When we become Christians God changes our nature (2 Cor. 5:17... “a new creation”).
- Those around us have the right to expect a CONSISTENT FRUIT from us.
- Then why do Christians still slip in this area?

Matthew 15:18-19

¹⁸But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.' "

Theodore Epp said,

- *Is it not strange that the tongue can be praising God one moment and be slandering some person the next moment, often right in the church where the tongue had been used to praise God?*
- *Such inconsistencies are not found in nature, but out of the human being can come both bitter and sweet words. Remember that the tongue speaks only what is in the heart. Godly words can come only from a godly heart.*
- So how do we DO THAT? Look at...

Colossians 3:5-10

Rules for Holy Living

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

John MacArthur said,

“... we cannot just sit back and say, "Well, God says I'm a new creation, it will all take place by itself." God says you're a new creation and it will all take place, but not by itself but through your Spirit-energized commitment... So while this passage...is a statement on the character of living faith as revealed by our speech, it is also a call for us to correct our speech because the two go hand in hand. What God says will be true of us, must be true of us. God takes care of the "will be" and we in submission to His power take care of the "must be."

- Every time we get ready to open our mouth we should pray Psalm 141:3: "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips"
- One last point to us believers. We may be congratulating ourselves by saying:
 - I don't CUSS!
 - I don't tell dirty jokes!
 - I don't lie about people!
- Before we get too self righteous here's a word from our Commentary this week:

"We may commend ourselves for avoiding some sins of speech but may accept the fact that we gossip, criticize, judge, curse, and condemn. This inconsistency is not acceptable... We are to control our speech so we consistently say what will help rather than what will harm or offend others."

- Not only must we SPEAK HARMLESSLY and CONSISTENTLY... we need to BEHAVE WISELY.
- Look at verses 13-18

Two Kinds of Wisdom

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

- People love to show off how much they know
- Several years ago A.J. Jacobs (an editor at Esquire Magazine) wrote a book entitled: "The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World."
- It's a memoir of the year he spent reading all 32 volumes of the 2002 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica—that's 33,000 pages with some 44 million words with the goal of becoming the smartest person in the world.
- In the end Jacobs admitted that all his INFORMATIONAL KNOWLEDGE isn't the same as WISDOM.
- We've all dealt with a "Know It All".
- James contrasts two kinds of WISDOM
 - The WISDOM OF THE WORLD
 - The WISDOM THAT COMES FROM GOD

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 (New International Version)

²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

- How do we spot **WORLDLY WISDOM** versus **GODLY WISDOM**?
- In verse 14, what are the two things characteristic of **WORLDLY WISDOM**?
 - Selfish Ambition
 - Bitter Envy
- Bitter Envy is all about being self-centered and wanting what belongs to others.
- As to **SELFISH AMBITION** - Our Commentary has a good quote about it:

“We cannot convince a class or congregation that God is great at the same time we are trying to convince them we are great.”

- What does verse 16 say are the results of **SELFISH AMBITION** and **BITTER ENVY**?
 - ¹⁶“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”
- So what about **REAL WISDOM**? **GODLY WISDOM**?
- Look at verse 13...how is **REAL WISDOM** displayed?
 - “Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”
- Verse 17 gives us more insight into **REAL WISDOM**:

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is:

- first of all pure;
 - then peace-loving,
 - considerate,
 - submissive,
 - full of mercy and good fruit,
 - impartial and sincere.
 - Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.
- Not exactly the characteristics of a **KNOW IT ALL** huh?

Eugene Peterson’s **THE MESSAGE** paraphrases verse 13 well:

¹³Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts.

Here's the TAKEAWAY:

- The tongue is a DEADLY WEAPON and we have to be careful how we use it.
- It's the MOTIVE behind what we say that matters.
- We can't RATIONALIZE DEADLY SPEECH with excuses.
- God provides the POWER to TAME THE TONGUE but WE must submit to it.
- Wisdom that comes from God is not SELFISH but HUMBLE; CONSIDERATE; and PEACEMAKING.

Next week in James 4: Drawing closer to God to do His will in our lives.