

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Fourth Quarter 2014: *The Book of James*

Lesson 7 “Taming the Tongue”

Read for this week’s study

James 3:1–12; Deut. 6:6, 7; Luke 9:51–56; Prov. 16:27; Matt. 7:16–18.

Memory Text

“ ‘For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned’ ” (Matt. 12:37, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Accountability
- III. Word Power
- IV. “Little” Things Are the Big Things
- V. Damage Control
- VI. Blessing and Cursing
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Jerry Winslow

1. Our lesson draws attention to the power of words. Words may be spoken or written. They may be signed or sung. They may be plain, or poetic, declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory. **Why does Scripture place so much emphasis on the importance of words?** Consider, for example, Genesis 1:3 when God speaks light into existence. Or think of the many passages in which the prophets declare that “mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Or ponder Jesus’ saying that we don’t live by bread alone but “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) Is it puzzling that John’s Gospel even tells us “The Word was God”? (John 1:1)
2. The 20 volume *Oxford English Dictionary* has full entries for 171,476 words. And because some words have many different definitions (just think of “square”) the OED provides approximately 750,000 definitions of words. Of the nearly one million words Shakespeare wrote, he used 31,534 different words, about 1,700 of which he invented! **Why so many words?** Have you ever invented a word that then became part of common parlance?

3. In our passage for this week's lesson, James teaches that not many of us should "presume to be teachers" because teachers "will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1) **Why are teachers held to a higher standard?**
4. Our passage from James has about 250 words, many of which are metaphors. The controller of the tongue is a "bridle" or a "rudder." The tongue itself is a "fire" that can burn down a "forest." The tongue is also a "wild animal" and full of "deadly poison." The words produced by the tongue are "fresh water" or "brackish water." And so forth. **Why do we use metaphorical language in which one thing is referred to as something else?** Isn't this confusing? Does this practice add to or subtract from understanding?
5. **What might metaphors for the tongue, such as a "bridle" or a "rudder" disclose about reality?** What might the metaphors obscure about reality?
6. We often use language to convey information and thereby give and receive education. The author of our lesson suggests that "as knowledge increases, dependence of God tends to diminish." **In your experience, as your knowledge has increased, has this led to a diminution of dependence on God?**
7. In describing the inspiration of the Bible's writers, Ellen White discusses the limitations of language: "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes." {1SM 20.2} **What does this truth about human communication and the Bible's inspiration tell us about the character of God?**
8. **What does this truth about human communication and the Bible's inspiration tell us about the character of God?**
9. Our lesson's passage from James expresses the truth that "We all stumble in many ways." (James 3:2) But this is followed immediately by the statement: "If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man." **Do such perfect people exist?** (Compare James 3:8.)
10. The lesson tells of the power of words. **What do you think are the most powerful words in our language?**
11. James tells us that "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing." (James 3:10) It is evident in biblical times that people considered both blessing and cursing to be powerful. To place a blessing or a curse on something or someone was a serious matter. **Do people today still view the offering of a blessing or the placing of a curse as actions that change reality?**

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

If only we had an audio-visual reproduction here! We just read the words. We can't hear the tears in Jesus' voice when He said, "You are of your father, the devil!" I love Ellen White's

comment that there were tears in His voice. And we know that would be so. These were His own children that He had come to save. And when the disciples suggested that He might like to burn up His opposition, He said, "I've not come to destroy. I've come to save." And in John 3, "I haven't come to condemn. I haven't come to judge." And so on. So you know those tears were there. Who inspired Hosea 11; all those tears in there? "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – John, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/57MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/58MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Does Paul have words to say about the tongue? Do you remember in the middle of that list of sins, that extraordinary list in Romans 1, what's dead center in it, but the sin of gossiping, the damage that is done? And look at all the trouble he got into, in his ministry, with people saying things.

Well, what started the whole great controversy? And of course, at the same time, what clears it all up? Would anybody say that Paul would object to what James has said about the tongue? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – James & 1 & 2 Peter, recorded July, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/75MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/76MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

There are many stories about Jesus not exposing sinners. Even the people who brought the woman taken in adultery. Now those were dastardly people, to bring that woman to Christ. They had even arranged for her to be caught in the very act. They set the whole thing up. What do you think of religious leaders who would set a woman up like that? How much lower can you sink? And Jesus wrote their sins in the dust on the ground. A few footsteps, a few puffs of wind, and they were gone. He even treated *those* people with respect. I think the message of all those stories that run all through Scripture is, there's no limit to God's memory, but we have nothing to fear from the infinite memory of God. The difficulty is will we have reason to fear each other's memory? Are some of us going to be cheap enough to go up to Rahab and ask her what it was like to follow her profession there in Jericho? Are we going to be gossips up there? Romans 1 says that gossips belong right in the middle of that almost unprintable list of sins. That's the reason. If one gossip who loves to spread other people's failures abroad should be admitted to the kingdom, look at the damage they could wreak. No gossip will be admitted to the kingdom. **The only people who will be saved are those who can be trusted with the memory of other people's sins and still treat them with respect.**

And that's why it will be possible, I believe, for David and Uriah to meet and not come to blows. Now it's true, Uriah doesn't know yet what happened. Uriah was one of David's best friends. He'd risked his life. He belonged to the special company that had risked their lives to make David king. And David stole his wife and arranged for his murder. And Uriah would only recall that he died in the service of his king. David knows better. But David also wrote the 51st psalm. Once again he became a man after God's own heart. I would expect to see David in the kingdom, and Uriah too. Some day they will meet face to face, and I'd like to be nearby. Do you think they will come to blows? Will anyone have told Uriah? If I were David, I would *have* to tell Uriah.

If some of you who may have wandered from the church and you knew your mothers were praying for you all those years and now you've come back—but Mother is dead. And you meet Mother in the kingdom; you mean you can't talk about it? Why, Mother will be thrilled to find you there, but she can't remember that you were ever anywhere else? And you can't remember either? Oh how moving it would be for a son to meet his mother in the hereafter. Well, think about what they would have to talk about. Is it possible to talk about remembered sins with the pain all gone? Are any of you here who are bosom friends now, and weren't always before? Are you always reminding each other of those sins? Offending each other? Hurting each other? You wouldn't want to hurt anybody anyway, especially your friend. Can you even *talk* about those days? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 2, recorded October, 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/3MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

We are to cultivate heavenly excellences of character. We are to learn what it means to have good-will toward all men, a sincere desire to be as sunshine and not as shadow in the lives of others. {3BC 1164.3}

Righteous words and deeds have a more powerful influence for good than all the sermons that can be preached.—ML 114. {VSS 52.1}

It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have,—the great mercy and love of God,—we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God. {MH 251.4}

Never should we forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our privilege to maintain a calm repose in God. {MH 253.1}

The most persuasive eloquence is the word that is spoken in love and sympathy. Such words will bring light to confused minds and hope to the discouraged, brightening the prospect before them. {OHC 295.5}

It is a wonderful thought that human beings can speak the Word of God, in simple words of comfort and encouragement. The humblest instruments will be used of God to sow the seeds of truth, which may spring up and bear fruit, because the one in whose heart they were sown needed help—a kind thought, a kind word, made effective by the One who has said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”—Letter 329a, Nov. 16, 1905, to her 19-year-old granddaughter Mabel. {TDG 329.6}