



Being Good News for Our Community - Spring 2017

Study 8 - Do Not Use Words to Harm



James 3:1-12; Ephesians 4:29

(sermons on March 12th)

James 3:1-2 Responsible Speaking

v.1 *we who teach will be judged more strictly – compare Jesus' words in Matthew 18:5-6 and his condemnation of 'hypocrites' who say one thing and do another (Matthew 23:1-4)*

v.2 *he is a perfect man – not so much perfect in the sense of 'without fault' as perfect in the sense of a 'mature, complete, integrated' person.*

1. The 'teachers' in verse 1 are primarily those who publicly teach the Christian faith, but how are we all 'teachers' to some extent? How can our words influence people towards, or away from, Christ?

James 3:3-8 Harmful Speaking

v.6 *a world of evil among the parts of the body – literally, 'the world of unrighteousness': so often, it is our tongues (our words) that lead the way so that the rest of our body comes under the influence of evil, and the forces of the world that ignore and defy God,*

v.6 *sets the whole course of his life on fire – has a continuing harmful effect on every aspect of lie*

v.8 *it is a restless evil – always ready to break out, like a smouldering flame*

2. Think about the pictures of the bit in the horse's mouth, the rudder of a ship and the spark of a fire. What do the pictures have in common in what they teach us about the power of the words that we say? What particular point does each illustration make?

3. What sort of damage can we do with our words: to other people, to the impact of the church on our community, and to ourselves?

Can we undo any of the harm that our words cause, or repair damaged relationships? How?

How can we control our tongues? How can we help each other to do so?

James 3:9-12 Consistent Speaking

These verses develop the idea of the 'double-minded' person in James 1:8 who is only half-committed and trusts in God only intermittently. They also echo Jesus' teaching about fruit in Matthew 7:15-20, just as so much of James' Letter echoes the Sermon on the Mount.

v.9 *who have been made in God's likeness – as Genesis 1:26-27.*

4. Do we see the inconsistency between praising God and denigrating our fellow human beings (v.9), specially those we see as 'brothers' and 'sisters' in Christ?

How do our words, spoken and unspoken, reveal what we are like inside (*see also Jesus' words in Matthew 12:33-35; 15:18*)? How can this turn us to prayer rather than despair? (*Galatians 5:22-23*)

Ephesians 4:29-32 Speaking to Build Up

v.30 *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God – our lives can bring God either grief or joy; he is not remote, or unaffected by what we do and say.*

5. What positive message about our words, as well as further warnings, are there in these verses?