

James – Life after Faith

James 1:26

“When a Loose Tongue Tells the Truth”

1. THE FAÇADE THAT RELIES ON OUTWARD RELIGION

A. Who is impressed by this?

B. What is involved in this?

2. THE FAILURE THAT REVEALS AN OUTWARD RELIGION

A. This illustrates a lack of discipline

B. This indicates a life of deception

3. THE FUTILITY THAT RESULTS FROM OUTWARD RELIGION

A. The efforts that are wasted

B. The end that is worthless

1. Chuck Swindoll tells a story about he and his wife eating at a restaurant called La Tunisia. The restaurant was decorated in a Moroccan style, and they served kebabs and other dishes native to that part of the world.

2. After they were seated, he noticed the waitress coming. She had dark hair, olive-colored skin, and dark eyes. He thought to himself, “Wow, I bet she’s from North Africa.”

3. She walked up to the table and said, “Hi! Ya’ll ordered ya’ll’s dranks yet?” It turns out the girl was from Tyler, TX. Her speech gave her away.ⁱ

4. Sometimes, all that is necessary to learn the truth about someone is for them to open their mouths and speak.

5. In James 1:26, we find a similar principle being expressed by Brother James. He says, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”*

6. James teaches us in this text that very often, a person’s spiritual condition is revealed, not by the exercise of religion, but by the expression of the tongue.

7. A loose tongue can very quickly expose the truth about a person whose religion is more about what is seen on the outside than what is settled on the inside.

8. James will have much more to say about the tongue later in this book. In this one verse, James simply asserts (as one writer puts it) that, “...a tongue uncontrolled by the speaker is the sign of a heart uncontrolled by the Savior.”ⁱⁱ

9. Look at this one verse with me, and notice some things we learn about a loose tongue and how it tells the truth about a person’s heart. First of all, James describes here:

I. THE FAÇADE THAT RELIES ON OUTWARD RELIGION

1. James says in verse 26, “If any man among you seem to be religious...” Note that word “seem”.
2. The word translated “seem” literally means to think or to suppose. For that reason, many translations will read, “If any man thinks he is religious...”
3. The idea behind this phrase is that a perception has been created, either by someone about themselves, or by others about someone, and the perception is that a person is religious.
4. The problem that James confronts in this verse is that this perception of religion is nothing but a façade. It is only an outward show.
5. Think with me about a couple of questions that arise about a person who has the outward appearance of being religious. First of all:

A. Who is impressed by this?

1. Whether the idea in verse 26 is of someone who appears to others to be religious, or of someone who merely thinks they themselves are religious; either way the focus of this religiousness is wrong.
2. Religion is not about impressing the neighbors, and having people around you believe that you are religious.
3. Nor is religion about convincing yourself of your own piety and righteousness. Religion is not supposed to be a boost to your ego.
6. Religious activity *should* have the goal of pleasing God. It should be done for His pleasure – not the pleasure of men.
7. If you think that I am religious, that is not all that spiritually helpful. Neither is it of eternal significance if I think that I am religious.
8. The only opinion of my religion that truly matters is the God of my religion – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Object and the Judge of my faith.
9. Pascal said that there are two kinds of men: the righteous who believe themselves sinners, and the sinners who believe themselves righteous.
10. A man’s religion may be impressive to himself and others, but if God is not pleased with him, it is merely a façade.

11. Notice something else about this religious façade that James describes. We ask not only who is impressed by this, but also:

B. What is involved in this?

1. Look again at verse 26. James says, “*If any man among you seem to be religious...*” Note that word “religious.”
2. The word translated “religious” only appears this once in the New Testament. It is a rare word, and scholars agree that it is difficult to adequately translate it into English.
3. It is a different form of the word translated “religion” later in this verse. That word speaks of the ceremonial services of worship.
4. In other words, what is involved in this religious façade are all the external works and activities that go along with religion.
5. This man that James describes carries a Bible, goes to Sunday School, sings in the choir, says “brother” and “sister”, and “amens” the preacher at all the right moments.
6. His doctrine is as straight as the part in his hair. He has a Jesus fish on his car, and he knows what “premillennial” means and why he is one.
7. All the external hallmarks of religion are displayed in this man’s life. He *seems* to be religious. He even thinks he *is* religious. The only problem is that it is all just a façade built on outward religion.
8. His religion is like Monopoly money. It is good to have when you’re playing the game, but won’t buy you anything when the game is over.
9. James is describing a pious impression - a religious mirage - that relies on the external, superficial motions of religion. Notice a second truth we draw from this verse.
10. We see here not only *the façade that relies on outward religion*, but notice also secondly that James points us to:

II. THE FAILURE THAT REVEALS AN OUTWARD RELIGION

1. In verse 26, James tells us that there is a clue – a sure symptom – of a religion that is built solely on outward and superficial things.

2. Look again at the verse. James says, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”*

3. It is interesting that an unbridled tongue is the one thing that James says reveals a surface-only religion. I am sure it is not the only thing, but it is the one thing James chooses to deal with.

4. As you consider the point James makes, it becomes clear how just how revealing a loose tongue can actually be. Notice a couple of things about the failure of a unbridled tongue. First of all:

A. It illustrates a lack of discipline

1. James describes someone in verse 26 who does not bridle their tongue. That is an interesting image. A bridle is a tool used to control a wild animal.

2. James is indicating that if our tongues go unchecked, they have the potential to run wild. How many of you know that this is true?

3. An unbridled tongue can get you into deep trouble. It can destroy relationships, damage reputations, and deliver wounds that seem to never heal.

4. Knowing this, for a person to let their tongue wag unchecked and unbridled is to show carelessness and a lack of discipline that simply cannot exist in a life where the Holy Spirit lives.

5. Just this past week I read in Proverbs 29:20 this proverb: *“Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.”*

6. Though some people would try to justify their unbridled tongue by saying, “That’s just how I am. I say what’s on my mind.”

7. James teaches us that there is a difference between candor and just plain carnality. A loose tongue is generally a sign of a lax life where personal and spiritual discipline is lacking.

8. In I Corinthians 9:27, Paul said, *“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...”* Literally, he said that he disciplined his body, and made it his slave.

9. William Penn once said, “No man is fit to command another who cannot command himself.” A loose tongue is symptomatic of someone who cannot control themselves. It points to a lack of discipline.

10. Notice something else about this particular failure that reveals an outward-only religion. Notice not only that an unbridled tongue illustrates a lack of discipline, but notice also further, and probably more importantly:

B. It indicates a life of deceit

1. Look again at what James says in verse 26. He says, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart...”*

2. In this verse James connects an unbridled, loose tongue with a deceived heart. Some might wonder why he says that a person who does not bridle their tongue, is deceiving their heart?

3. To answer that, I want to remind you of something the Lord Jesus said. In Matthew 12:34, He said, *“...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*

4. Now let's tie all of this in. James describes a person who is outwardly religious. They go to church, they tithe, they say “amen”. However, they have a loose, unbridled tongue that gossips and gripes, condemns and complains, insults and injures.

5. James says that they are deceiving, or literally “tricking” their own heart. In other words, while they think they are religious, their unbridled tongue tells the truth, and they are only tricking themselves with all their religious activity.

6. Oh friend! It is possible to numb yourself with the opiate of religious activity, and trick yourself into thinking you are going to heaven, when you are actually headed to hell from your seat on the church pew.

7. While painting the “Last Judgment” scene in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo was constantly being nagged and pestered by one of the Pope's assistants who wanted to get a glimpse of the work before it was completed.

8. When the work was finally unveiled, the assistant was horrified to find that the artist had painted him into the scene – among the people in hell.

9. I fear there are some outwardly religious people who are going to be terribly horrified to find that they should have paid more attention to the condition of their heart that was constantly revealed by their tongue.

10. There is a third truth that James gives us in this text that teaches us an important lesson about the loose tongue that tells the truth. Notice not only *the façade that relies on outward religion*, and *the failure that reveals an outward religion*, but notice also lastly:

III. THE FUTILITY THAT RESULTS FROM OUTWARD RELIGION

1. Don't miss the sad words at the close of verse 26. If a person thinks they are religious, but deceive themselves about their unbridled tongue, James says, "...*this man's religion is vain.*"
2. The last five words point us to the futility of outward religion when it is not motivated and empowered by a regenerated heart.
3. Religion alone is an empty pursuit. Only when a person has been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and born-again by His grace, will religious activity be of any value.
4. Notice a couple of things about the futility that results from outward religion. First of all, think of:

A. The efforts that are wasted

1. James says, "...*this man's religion is vain.*" Notice that word "religion". Again, it describes the things that a person does in the worship of a god – whether the true God or a false one.
2. This is the lighted candles, the offerings, the prayers, the songs, and the services. It is the external work of religion.
3. James says that all of this is vain for the man whose unbridled tongue reveals an unsaved heart.
4. Think of that! All the hours in church, all the sermons in the ears, all the dollars in the plate – all of it wasted for the man whose religion is vain.
5. There are millions of people sitting on pews in churches today that are doing nothing but wasting time.
6. They think they are chalking up religious points on some great tally sheet in the sky, but it is all just a meaningless show, and a waste of time.
7. Our federal government seems to have a gift for wasteful spending. In a recent paper that listed 50 examples of government waste, I found that Washington has spent \$3 billion re-sanding beaches, even as most of this new sand is simply washed back into the ocean.ⁱⁱⁱ
8. Unfortunately, our churches are full of people who keep piling fresh religious works on top of their old ones, and all of them will simply be washed away and wasted in the tide of Judgment Day.

9. Notice not only that the futility of outward religion is because of the efforts that are wasted, but notice also:

B. The end that is worthless

1. James says that a man who thinks he's religious, but does not bridle his tongue, is practicing a religion that is vain. The word translated "vain" literally means "empty of result."

2. It is the same word that Paul used in Acts 14:15, where he encouraged the people of Lystra to turn from the "vanities" of worshiping false idols.

3. Imagine in your mind someone bowing down to an idol. They offer it sacrifices. They pray to an image of wood or stone.

4. In their minds all of their attention and devotion to this idol are going to result in their entrance into paradise at the end of their life.

5. The sad truth, however, is that the end of all their religious efforts will be "vain" and worthless.

6. Now, James 1:26 was written, not to some pagan, idol-worshipper on the other side of the world, but to a person who sings "Jesus Saves", and sits in a Christian church.

7. James says all of their religious works are vain and worthless in the end. The heaven they sang about, and hoped to reach through their religious efforts they will never see.

8. Like a person who carries an umbrella into a hurricane and hopes to stay dry, there is a futility that results from outward religion that lacks an inward conversion.

1. On its surface, James 1:26 seems like a quaint little verse about the importance of controlling your tongue.

2. While controlling your tongue is important, the deeper issue in this verse is the question of the authenticity of your faith.

3. An unbridled tongue is a symptom of a much deeper problem. A loose tongue tells the truth about a lost soul.

4. James challenges us with the verse to “examine ourselves” and see whether we are serving Christ with a pure heart, or just heaping up a pile of worthless, futile religious acts that will mean nothing in eternity.

5. A religious façade, built solely on outward religion will crumble quickly before the penetrating eyes of Jesus the righteous Judge.

6. May we all make certain that our tongues are bridled and our hearts are covered by the blood of Jesus!

ⁱ Swindoll, Charles, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, (Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998), p. 532

ⁱⁱ Blanchard, John, Truth for Life, (Evangelical Press, Durham, England, 1986), p. 104

ⁱⁱⁱ Riedl, Brian M., 50 Examples of Government Waste, 10/6/09, *The Heritage Foundation*, accessed 10/31/09, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm2642.cfm>