

Swearing, Oaths and Profanity

Listed Scriptures

Jas 3:1–12; Prov 10:19, 15:11, 25:11, 29:1; Mt 12:36, 37; Eph 5:4; Col 4:6

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students will know to be careful in their speech
- 2) That the students will attempt to practice being gracious in their speech in their daily lives

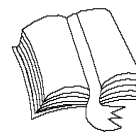
Memory Verse

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” (Eph 4:29)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Jas 3; Prov 10, 15, 25, 29; Mt 12; Eph 5; Col 4

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The Bible is a rich resource for guidance in our daily lives, even with regard to our speech. In the Old Testament, we have exemplary people of God who were gracious in both their conduct and by inference, their speech. For instance, we know the story of how Isaac refused to contend with his neighbors who had taken over or covered up his wells (Gen 26). Although the Bible did not explicitly tell us what Isaac said to his neighbors, we can be sure that he did not speak harshly to them or pick a fight. In the same way, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther also had success among gentiles. Surely they must have practiced prudence and wisdom in their speech in addition to good conduct. As we study this lesson, we can remind ourselves and our students of how many saints of old were successful in their lives on earth. God’s blessings are definitely a reason for that. But their own effort in exercising control over their speech is not a factor to be discounted. For as the proverb goes, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

The Book of Proverbs provides much direct advice about bridling our tongues. We will take a look at a few of the verses in this lesson. However, there are many more proverbs not covered here that the teacher (and students) can refer to as guides to daily living. We may want to encourage our students to read the book of Proverbs every day, in addition to their Bible reading schedule. This great book of wisdom can never be exhausted as far as teachings about our life's journey are concerned. It should be a daily supplement, all through a Christian's life.

W A R M U P



In the world that we live in today, there is a lot of swearing going around. It may not be swear words hurled intentionally at a particular person during a fight. In fact, if we were to stand back and observe, we'd notice that people use swear words so frequently that no one even takes offense at times. As Christians, we are probably aware that we should avoid getting into verbal disputes with anyone. But, do we check ourselves against using any swear words in our daily conversations?

One day, a seven-year-old brother came back home and asked his mom, "Mommy, tell me what the 'B-word' and the 'F-word' are! All my friends laugh at me because I do not know what those words are." His mother did not know how to answer him, except to tell him that those words are "bad words" and he should never ever use them. This incident goes to tell us that using swear words (even when not swearing in real disputes) is common. As Christians, we must guard ourselves against this trend.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Our Speech (James 3:2-12)

How important is speech in our relationships with both God and people? The Bible tells us that anyone who does not falter in his speech is a perfect man. With our tongues, we can praise God and bring comfort to others. With our tongues we can also commit sin against God and bring distress and detriment to ourselves and

others around us. The tongue is such an important part of our lives that we cannot but be vigilant about how we use it. Today, we'll study the importance of the tongue in our lives as Christians. Read James 3:2-12 and discuss the following questions:

1. The Perfect Man (v. 2)

- What does this passage say about "the perfect man"?
- How is the tongue related to all other aspects of our spiritual cultivation? For example, how can one who can control his tongue also control his whole body?
- Do you think it is possible to be perfect by this definition? If not, do you think it's possible to come close to that standard?

If we do not falter in our speech at all, we can be considered a perfect person. But the fact is, we all falter with our words because we speak a lot. From morning until night, when we are with people, we inevitably engage in conversation. And when we converse we do not have time to "proof-read" or "edit" our words before they are out of our mouths. That's why we often find ourselves saying things we don't mean, or not expressing things in the way we want the message conveyed. If we can be very alert and careful about our words, we are probably also very alert about other parts of our spiritual cultivation.

2. Metaphors used to describe the tongue (v. 3, 4, 5)

- James uses different metaphors to describe the tongue. Identify these metaphors. (bits in horses' mouths, small rudder in a ship, little fire that burns a whole forest)
- Are these metaphors aptly used?
- How is the tongue like each of these things he compared it to?

3. The tongue is "full of deadly poison" (v. 8)

- What are the ways a tongue can do damage and "poison" people?
- Have you done damage with your tongue before?
- What were the consequences?
- How did you feel after that event?
- In hindsight, do you think you could have done better in the same situation?

4. We use our tongues both to bless and to curse (v. 9-12)

- Is your tongue a spring that sends forth fresh water or one that sends forth bitter water?
- Other than praising God, how else can we put our tongues to good use?

(Our tongues can be used to say good things to people, speak words of comfort, speak words of encouragement, preach the gospel, sing praises/hymns.)

- c. Give examples of blessings or gracious words that we can use our tongues for.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 Give three metaphors used by James to describe the tongue.

2 In what ways can the tongue be “deadly”?

3 In what ways can the tongue be used for blessing?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A- Controlling Our Tongues

The Bible gives us good advice about controlling our tongues. If we can fully abide by the biblical teachings, we will definitely be close to being a “perfect man” as mentioned in James 3:2. For the following verses, write down an example in your life whereby you can apply the teaching. Then, share your examples with the rest of the class. The first one has been done for you as an illustration of the task.

1. Proverbs 10:19

It is logical to think that the more we speak the more chances there are for saying the wrong things. One scenario I can think of is when I hang out with my friends. Often, the conversations go into topics related to people rather than just events/things. And, in a group, with one person saying one thing, and another adding on details, it can easily get out of hand and we lapse into gossiping.

Once, I was with a friend who was really mad at someone about something. She started to talk about all the things that the person had done in the past (which was not related to the current incident). First, I agreed with the things she said. Then I

found myself joining in the “verbal bashing” of that person, behind her back. It just came naturally. It’s hard to check ourselves when we’re in a group. So, it’s best to have self-control about how much we talk. The less we talk, the less opportunity there is for saying the wrong things.

2. Proverbs 15:1

3. Proverbs 25:11

4. Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2

5. Matthew 5:33-37

6. Matthew 12:36, 37

7. Ephesians 5:4

8. Colossians 4:6

Part B- Stories Concerning Speech

We must have heard of the saying, “Little droplets of water make a great ocean.” We may not realize how far-reaching the effects of good behavior and gracious speech are. In fact, if we always demonstrate graciousness in our speech, we can have a great impact on the people around us. For one, at the very least, we can glorify God’s name among non-believers. We may even touch them through our gracious speech and bring them to Christ.

In this section, we’ll first read a short testimony of a sister who shone for God at her work place. Then we will construct our own stories or scenarios of people who have (or have not) glorified God’s name in their lives. We will share these stories with the rest of the class. We will try to learn some lessons from each story.

A Testimony

Jean works as an administrative assistant in a relatively large department in her firm. Her job requires her to deal with many different levels of the staff. As such, she has to handle all kinds of people in a typical day at work. There are some who are usually nice and gracious. But, there are also others who are often impatient and make unreasonable demands. Sometimes, when the work pressure builds up in the office, people can get rather quick-tempered and even unpleasant in their speech.

Jean understands that as a Christian, she must put God before herself. That means she should shine for God and glorify God's name before her own pride and feelings. To be gracious in her speech and mild-tempered amid all kinds of stress is her constant prayer. In her office, no matter whom she deals with, she tries her best to always be courteous and gentle in her speech. To her, this is but her basic Christian duty.

Little did she realize that her gracious ways have touched the heart of one of her co-workers. One day, this co-worker came up to her and asked her, "Which church do you go to? May I go with you to your church for service?" Jean was really surprised. She had never preached to this co-worker before. Why would this co-worker ask to go with her to our church? When she asked why, the co-worker told her that she had observed that her conduct has been extraordinary and believed that she must have come from a very good church.

Constructing your own stories/scenarios

This short testimony shows us the importance of our speech and conduct in our everyday lives. Having read the testimony, it is now your turn to share a testimony. If it is a good testimony, we can emulate the good example. If it is a "reverse-example," i.e. a testimony about some mistake or an incident that did not glorify God's name, we can also learn from it and not follow in the same footsteps. As you write your testimony or a testimony of someone you know, pay attention to the following questions. You should not mention the names of the people involved in your narration. After writing, discuss with the class what can be learned.

Questions to think about:

1. *What types of people did the person have to deal with?*
2. *What was the incident about or what type of situation was involved?*
3. *What did you think was going through the mind of the person when the incident happened?*
4. *What did the person do?*
5. *What were the reactions of the other people who were present?*
6. *If it is a reverse-example, what do you think the person could have done differently?*



Sing Hymn 212. The Lord Jesus teaches us to "let your light so shine before men" (Mt 5:16). In our daily lives, we cannot avoid speaking to people. Since speech is such an integral part of our lives, we cannot but be very wary of ourselves; of how we use these little tongues of ours. Do we use them to bring grace to others and glorify God or do we use them to cause harm? May God help us to bridle our tongues, so that we can shine for Him through our speech.