

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Use Your Tongue Wisely

James 5:12-20

1 How do you use your tongue wisely? 2

Let us look at James, chapter 5, verses 12 through 20. Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹ 3

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ² 4

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for

¹ James 5:12-14.

² James 5:15-16.

three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.³ ⁵

The first thing this scripture tells us about how to use your tongue wisely is . . .

I. The Wrong Way to Use Your Tongue - v12

The wrong way to use your tongue. ⁶ Verse 12 reads, **Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.** ⁷

The first wrong way is **swearing**. ⁸ Americans tend to swear by using words associated with human immorality. ⁹ Europeans swear by defaming God and spiritual things in some way. ¹⁰

³ James 5:17-20.

Swearing, or blasphemy, ⁴ means abusive speech, personal mockery. It came to mean deriding God and His power in some way, slandering or speaking lightly or profanely of sacred things. ¹¹

Lord Jesus was accused of blasphemy when He said things that sounded like He was making Himself equal with God. ¹²

Mark, chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, **Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** ¹³ Again, in chapter 14, verses 63 and 64, **The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”** ¹⁴ And then, again in John, chapter 10, verse 33, **“We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”** ¹⁵

⁴ βλασφημέω.

Swearing violates one of the Ten Commandments. Exodus, chapter 20, verse 7 states, **You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**

¹⁶ The King James Version translates this phrase “taking the Lord’s name in vain”. I like that translation.

¹⁷ “In vain” means to empty or deflate.

As I was studying the implications of this commandment for a message, I came to this conclusion; **using terms referring to God or the Lord as an exclamation is a reference to God taken lightly - in vain!** Exclamations, using divine references, is disrespect! But how many of us Christians do this without thinking?

I was on an archeological team digging in Israel several years ago. We would spend the weekends in Jerusalem. I asked my Jewish friends to take me to synagogue on Friday evenings. They were delighted that their Christian friend was that interested in their worship. In a couple of those Sabbath services the

scriptures were read in unison by the congregation. My Hebrew was not good enough for me to read with them, but I could follow along in the text. Sure enough, as I had been taught earlier, every time they came to the divine name ⁵ they would substitute the word “Lord” ⁶ in its place. This is general Jewish practice so as not to, accidentally, disrespect God.

It is a practice I follow as well. I have decided not to use the name “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” unless I am teaching or deliberately need to use those names. Then I do so conscious of not using them in an irreverent way.

While a student in seminary I was the pastor of a small congregation in the mountains of southwest Virginia. One of the ladies in the church was a very gracious southern bell. When she would get excited, she would exclaim, “O Lord!” This lady loved Jesus and His

⁵ יהוה

⁶ אֲדֹנָי

church. If she ever thought she was being disrespectful to the Lord, she would be aghast!

Do you use exclamations like, “O Lord!”, “God!”, “Jesus!”, or “Jesus Christ!”? Maybe, using these terms should only happen when you are talking about them respectfully or addressing them in prayer. ¹⁸

The second way to do it wrong is **oath taking**.

Does this mean you can't take an oath in court?

You can “affirm” in court. ¹⁹ Oaths taken in court are permitted in the Bible. ²⁰ Exodus, chapter 22, verse 11 says, . . . **the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the LORD that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person's property.** ²¹ Numbers, chapter 5, verse 19, **Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her . . . ,** ²² and Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 13, **Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.** ²³

But the Lord Jesus did say, **Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.** ⁷ ₂₄ In fact, the Lord said, **Do not swear at all!** ⁸ That should be enough for us! The Lord considers doctoring up your speech by adding needless adjectives just evil! ₂₅

Now let’s look at the . . .

II. Right Ways to Use Your Tongue - v13-20

Right ways to use your tongue. ₂₆

The first is **Praise the Lord when you are happy!** Verse 13 says, **Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.** ₂₇

The word sing ⁹ means to pick, rub, pull, twitch, or strum a musical instrument. ₂₈

⁷ Matthew 5:37.

⁸ Matthew 5:34.

⁹ ψάλλω.

An example of singing with an instrument is Psalm, chapter 33, verse 2, **Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.** ²⁹

This same word is used in Romans, chapter 15, verse 9, **Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.** ³⁰ Again, this word is used in First Corinthians, chapter 14, verse 15, **I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.** ³¹

So, praise when you are happy! ³² The shepherds did after they left the manger. ¹⁰ ³³ The disciples did before the Triumphal Entry. ¹¹ ³⁴

The second right way to use your tongue is to **pray when you are sick.** ³⁵

Verses 17 and 18 here point out the power of prayer, **Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that**

¹⁰ Luke 2:20 - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

¹¹ Luke 19:37 - When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

³⁶ This is in reference to the passages found in First Kings, chapter 17, verse 1, **Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”**

³⁷ After two and a half years, Elijah prayed again and the drought ended. ¹² ³⁸

Verses 14 and 15 tell us what to do when we are sick, **Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. You call the elders of the church to pray for you and to anoint you with oil.** ³⁹

¹² I Kings 18:41-46.

Will the sick person get well if the elders anoint him and pray? This scripture seems to say so. But this passage is very controversial!

Read these verses again. Is this physical healing or salvation from sin? Let us look at the two possibilities and then, I will tell you the conclusion I came to. ⁴⁰

Possibility # 1 is that the anointing with oil could be administering medicine. Prayer and medicine should go together. ⁴¹

Make well ¹³ means to save, keep from harm, rescue as well as heal. ⁴²

Verse 16 continues, **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.** This word **heal** ¹⁴ means definitely physical healing! ⁴³

Remember First John, chapter 1, verse 9, **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will**

¹³ σώζω.

¹⁴ ἰάομαι.

forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. When we confess our sin, He will forgive. That's the promise! So, when you discover sin in your life, confess it and accept the promised forgiveness! ⁴⁴

Possibility # 2 is that the anointing with olive oil could be ceremonial. ⁴⁵

The sick call the elders.

The elders anoint and pray.

Physical healing happens! ⁴⁶

So - what is my conclusion? This scripture indicates that both physical healing and salvation from sin can happen!

Here's how I deal with this. When I am asked to come, anoint with oil and pray. Out of simple obedience to this scripture I go, anoint with oil and pray for physical and spiritual healing. I don't draw conclusions or make promises; I just obey! We leave

the results to God! I have seen on occasion gradual physical healing take place. ⁴⁷

The third right way to use your tongue is **to confess your sins to some other Christian whom you trust.** Verse 16, **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.** The prayers of a prayer warrior are powerful with the Lord! ⁴⁸

One of the main purposes for the church is to comfort, encourage and build one another in faith. ¹⁵ When someone confesses sin to you it is a sacred honor to be held in strictest confidence. So, build trust relationships among your Christian friends so you can safely do this. This is one of the purposes for building small ministry teams in the congregation. ⁴⁹

The final right way to use your tongue, in this passage, is **to witness to those who have turned their**

¹⁵ I Thessalonians 5:11 - Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

back on the Lord. This concept is found in verses 19 and 20, **My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.**

There are two things in these scriptures that need to be mentioned.

It is possible for you to turn your back on the Lord and be lost! If you leave the Lord your soul will die. If you leave the Lord, you will be accountable for your sins!

The second thing is your witness could bring someone back to a saving relationship with the Lord!

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The takeaway from this message is this. Remember how important and influential your words really are. Use those words to comfort, build up and to glorify God!

Then - you will be using your tongue for what it was intended!

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