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Let Your Yes be Yes, and Your No be No

James 5:12

Prayer: *Father, we do again thank you for your grace and your mercy, we thank you that we are here to worship you this morning, and Father, part of that worship is offering up song and word, part of that worship is also opening up your book, listening attentively to what it is you have for us. I thank you for the privilege you've given to me to be able to speak that word. I pray that you would give me the ability to speak it accurately and with the power and the presence of your Holy Spirit, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have spent the last few weeks speaking about patience under trials. We've seen James warn us about grumbling, encourage us to be long tempered in how we respond to attacks and steadfast in the way we bear up under the stress and strain of a trial. Now as is often the case with James, he focuses on the tongue as the place where stress and strain get expressed. In fact, if we look at the entire book of James, we see that the tongue plays a huge role in James' understanding of what it means to be a believer.

From the first chapter until the last, James continues to hammer away at the sins of the tongue. And our text this morning is James' fifth and final word on the use and misuse of the tongue, it is James 5:12: *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

Well, before we tackle this final word, I thought it would be wise to briefly review all the other words that James has had to say about the use of the tongue. So we start with the first chapter, James 1:19: *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.* And we considered the words, "be slow to speak." When does that admonition apply to your life? I don't think James is really lauding people who refuse to open their mouths. Rather he is describing a particular circumstance where it is critical to be quick to hear and slow to speak. So think about it for a minute. When do you take great pains to keep your mouth shut? When do you have to exercise the discipline of not interrupting someone? Let me give you a quick hint question. Are you quick to interrupt people when they are telling you how wonderful you are? When you're being complimented, do you instantly cut people off and just stop them in their tracks? No, the only time that I have to really be slow to speak is when I've just heard something that is sorely tempting me to

shoot off my mouth in my defense. And God speaks to that directly in Proverbs 17:28, he says: *Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.* See, God says there is a time when it is wise to hold your peace, and that time's often when you're hearing something you don't want to hear.

You know, one thing that I notice is that my -- my desire to respond, my desire to be quick to speak instead of slow, well that can easily overwhelm my ability to listen. There's a huge difference between trying to hear what my wife is actually trying to tell me and actually just gathering enough information and ammunition to mount a response. You know, in one case I'm actually hearing to listen. In the other case, I'm really just gathering intelligence. You know, "There's a logical fallacy there," "There's a misstatement there," "Oh, I just heard an exaggeration." That's not listening. That's making preparation for war, and believe me, I have done both. I've actually tried to listen and I know I've spent times when I've just tried to gather intelligence. And you can guess which one is more effective. Be quick to hear and slow to speak is just another way of describing working hard at listening, particularly when someone's telling you something you don't want to hear.

Now, the second statement that James makes is this. This is James 1:26. He says: *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* We spent a lot more time on this particular scripture. We looked at James' treatment of the tongue. We talked about two different ways that people have to bridle their tongues. There is an outside-in approach and there's an inside-out approach. God's way's always the inside-out. And the world's is always the outside-in. And at its worst, outside-in is illustrated by the Pharisees, the very ones that Jesus called whitewashed tombs. This is what he said in Matthew 23:27, he said: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."* You see, the outside-in approach of the Pharisees says if you want religion to be worthwhile, you better learn how to bridle your tongue. To a certain very limited extent you can do that. The outside-in approach mistakenly identifies the tongue itself and it seeks to curb -- it seeks to find ways to address the curbing of the tongue not from the inside but from the outside. You know, we even saw an article, there was a local government that tried to impose fines on individuals in that town for cursing. It didn't work. You know, local churches may also attempt to impose

some kind of social stigma on a sort of behavior that they don't want to hear or see, and in the end you may get your desired results if all you desire is a lessening of the amount of coarse language or gossip, but as I said, this is not really what James is after. See, James is speaking to brothers in Christ. He is speaking to those who have already received Christ as Lord and savior. God's Holy Spirit has already indwelt them and he is inside them now in the process of sanctifying him or her from the inside out. James knows that the problem with the tongue can never really be addressed from outside because it is an internal problem. Jesus made that quite clear in Matthew 15:10. This is what he said: *And he called the people to him and he said to them, "Hear and understand: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."* Then he went on to say, *"Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."* Jesus is saying this is what the heart of man contains. He's saying the heart of man is filled with evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness and slander. And you know the outside-in approach to fix it has to find a reward or sanction that will somehow curb the output not of

the heart but of the expression of the heart; the tongue. Now that's like trying to fix a toothache by putting an aspirin on your tooth. The only way you're ever going to fix a toothache is to fix the internal source of the toothache which is the rot and the decay that's inside the tooth. The same is true with the rot and the decay that's inside of our hearts. Jesus tells us that our hearts are filled with rot and that the solution is not a new set of rules, it's not a new set of sanctions designed to limit the output of the heart; God says the solution is a brand new heart. In Ezekiel 36, he says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* That's the inside-out approach. The inside-out approach says if you are one of God's own, then inside you right now is the very Spirit of God. Inside you right now Romans 8:9 says this: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. See, it is God's Spirit and not your flesh who is actively about the process of bridling your tongue. It's not from the outside, it's from the inside and not because you have to but because now you want to. God's Holy Spirit is actively transforming you into the image of his Son, not just at the tongue, but first and foremost in*

the heart. That's why James can say in James 1:26: *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*

The second chapter of James contains our third admonition about the tongue. James says in James 2:12: *Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom. For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* We spent a lot of time on this text. There's another translation of James 2:12 that says this, it says: *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* Think about that. Law and liberty. James is combining two completely different concepts here. One binds, and the other one sets free. This law of liberty is a radically different way of living out our Christian lives. It is the power of living out the life that God has for us, not out of fear, not out of pride, not out of selfishness but out of a genuinely liberated understanding. That's what 2 Corinthians 5:17 is saying. It says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Jesus is offering us liberation and he's offering it to us in the truest sense and he offers it on three different levels. The first level is the level of liberty to choose Christ in the first place, the second is the liberty that Christ gives us from the law; and the third is the law of liberty that Christ gives us to live life

as this brand new creature.

First is the liberty to choose Christ. Now here's the question. Did you choose Christ or did Christ choose you? You know, and if he did choose you, where is your freedom? If he chose you, where is your free will? Let me first point out, there is no such thing as absolute freedom. It does not exist. Absolute freedom would include the freedom of an electron to spin right out of its orbit, it would include the freedom of raindrops to fall up because they're no longer bound by gravity, it would be the freedom of the sun to just spin out of the solar system. Absolute freedom means absolute chaos. So all freedom is in some ways bound. Well, human freedom is also bound. We have the freedom of a free will, but we don't have liberty. We have free wills. Let me repeat that because people accuse reformed people of denying that all the time. We have free wills. What we don't have is the liberty to exercise those genuinely free wills because our choices have been severely narrowed by the fall.

Let me give you an explanation from McDonald's. Okay. Let's say that you go to McDonald's for dinner. You know, you walk into McDonald's, you're free to choose absolutely anything from their extensive menu. You can get a Quarter Pounder, you can get a Big Mac, you can get a Double Cheese Burger, you can get a combo meal,

whatever you'd like. What you can't get is steak and lobster because at McDonald's steak and lobster is just not on the menu. Now, when you walk into McDonald's, you have the freedom to choose but only from what's up there on the menu. You see, we humans have lots and lots of freedom and we make lots and lots of choices and so it appears to us that we are truly free, but it's only when we examine the choices we are capable of making that we understand that our choices are also limited. Picture a menu, and our menu is entitled "Sons of Adam." This is the moral menu that we get to pick from. Every son of Adam has the freedom to choose from the menu we've all inherited from the fall. Unfortunately it is not very morally appetizing. God gives us a look at this menu in Galatians 5:19. This is what he says, he says: *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* This is a terrible menu. This is an awful menu. This is why God says in Romans 3:10: *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one."*

Now, you may be thinking, are you going to tell me that all those

lovely people that we know who are not born again Christians are just these seething cauldrons of vile works of the flesh such as Paul has given us in this list, and that they too can only work from a menu that's really been defined by debauchery? Well, the answer is no. You and I know lots and lots of people who are outside the kingdom of Christ who genuinely try to live exemplary moral lives. What we don't realize is that the ability to lead those lives is part of the common grace that God extends to virtually everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. It was Jesus who said this in Matthew 5:45: *"For he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."* And what he's saying is that every human being who has ever lived is living under the grace that God gives them, and if we didn't have that grace, we would literally bite and devour each other. We would not survive as a species. That common grace gives us the freedom to make choices. It gives us the freedom to make choices that enable us to live quite, peaceable, productive lives as good citizens. What we don't have within that free will is the liberty to choose from a menu that includes Jesus Christ. That choice came off the menu when Adam fell and Satan got control of this earth. You know, 1 John 5:19 says: *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* Part of that control includes blinding the world to the choice of the gospel. Folks cannot believe what they cannot

see. 2 Corinthians 4:3 says: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* So we have an enemy that blinds, spiritually blinds the eyes of the world. So they can see the cross, they can hear and they can know about the resurrection, they can know that their lives are not working, but they cannot connect the dots. So the whole idea of the cross seems foolish. It seems ridiculous. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

So the question is: How do you think you are able to connect the dots? How does it make perfect sense to you that *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* Well, God tells us why. He told the disciples why in Matthew 13:11, he says this, he said: *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."* What Jesus told the disciples we see played out even today. See, by the grace of God alone, we understand that God became man in the flesh, that he lived a perfect life and that he died in our place so that he could glorify his Father by raising

up, according to 1 Peter 2:9: *A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* And by grace we understand that Jesus saved us so that we could be, according to Ephesians 1:6: *To the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he made us accepted in the beloved.*

So what does all this have to do with this law of liberty that James is speaking of? You see, when Jesus found us, we had no liberty. We didn't have that. When Jesus found us, we were slaves. Adam's fall had blinded us and made each of us incapable of making the choice for Jesus because Jesus was no longer on the menu. We had the freedom to choose but we didn't have the liberty to choose Jesus, and that's what Jesus came to liberate us to. Jesus opened his public ministry with these words in Luke 4:17, he said: *"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."* So that liberty, that very first liberty, the liberty to choose Christ in the first place is the first one that we get from Jesus.

The second liberty, the one that James is referring to here is the

liberty from the power of the law. This is what James says in James 2:12, he says: *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* What does he mean by that? Well, to be judged by the law of liberty is to have my sin and my condemnation poured out to the very last drop not on me but on Christ. In Romans 8:1 it says: *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.* Christ has already paid my penalty. And so we obey Christ now not because we have to but because we want to. It was Jonathan Edwards who said, "Religious people" -- and that's not a good term that he was using there -- he said, "Religious people are people who obey God out of an empty heart." The law of liberty gives us the freedom to pursue God from a full heart. *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.* So we pursue God from a full heart because we know we are now under the law of liberty. The law of liberty has given us freed -- with a "D" -- freed wills that not only have the freedom to choose but also the liberty to make choices that we never had before. Choices to obey Christ, to obey his Holy Spirit, to allow his Holy Spirit to shape us into His image, choices that had been stolen from us in the Garden of Eden.

The third chapter of James says this in James 3:5, he says: *So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full the deadly poison. We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it. Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way.*

Well, there's three things that James takes up here. First he's discussing the seriousness of the sins of the tongue, and then he's discussing the scope of that sin, and finally the solution to the sin of the tongue. Part of the reason he says and part of the reason we understand that we don't take these sins seriously is because we don't fully grasp the scope of the sins of the tongue. And the reason why we don't grasp the scope of the sins of the tongue is because they are ubiquitous. That's a 50 cent word that means everywhere. There is not a person in this room who has not in some way been hurt or defiled by the sins of the tongue. The solution we've already discovered. It's not the outside-in of the

world, it's the inside-out of the Holy Spirit, something that requires a spiritual heart transplant.

Next James takes on judgmentalism. In James 4:11, he says this. He says: *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.* Well, you know, speaking evil of others is a sin that's been with us from the very beginning. It is so much a part of the fabric and nature of our culture that we take great pains to use God's own wisdom to be able first of all see it, then to stop it, and then to be able to surrender the desire to do it to Christ. Listen to what James says. He says: *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?* So the first thing we want to do when it comes to speaking evil against one another is to be able to just see it, to understand it, to perceive it.

Make no mistake, judgmentalism is the sin that James is condemning in our text this morning, but judgmentalism is not nearly as easy to identify as we would think. When you live in a culture as we do that has as its highest moral ethic, tolerance, well then the only really intolerable sin that the culture cares about is

judgmentalism as our culture understands it. Today making the claim that marriage is an institution designed by God to unite a man and a woman for life, well that's the height of judgmentalism. In fact, it's beyond that. It is now considered hate speech. Claiming that a baby in the womb has the inherent right to stay alive is now a bigoted attack on women's freedom. Those are two obvious examples, but the hypersensitivity towards judgmentalism that's been fostered by the culture of tolerance, it extends in every different direction. Now, we've entered into a culture and a climate that projects the notion that no one has the right to say anything to anyone about anything. I saw on TV the other night that they were talking about a man who had fathered 22 children through scores of women, and he's sitting right there saying well, I love these kids, I don't -- I won't support them financially, I won't support them emotionally, they're scattered all over the place, but I love my kids and I love women. Nobody says is a word. Nobody says hey, maybe this is a bad thing? That's the attitude that has permeated our culture, and it has extended itself into the church. We've created a climate in which speaking the truth in love is by far the exception rather than the rule. So there needs to be a healthy balance here between being willing to challenge my brother and sister about something in his or her life than speaking evil of my brother to someone else.

You know, we need to distinguish between the act of judging and the finality of passing judgment. They are two very, very different things, one of which is required of us, the other of which is forbidden. Listen to what James says in 4:11, he says: *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.* What's going on here is that James is saying it is a final condemning judgment that God forbids. So if God is condemning is type of judgment but he's not condemning judgment per se. The difference between the two is the difference between discerning the good or bad in another person's circumstance or conduct and passing final judgment on that person. I am required to exercise discernment, but after all, it was Jesus who said in Matthew 7:6: *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.* How are you going to do that without exercising some discernment? You got to know who a pig is. You got to know what a dog is. But I'm also forbidden from making that discernment into a final judgment about any person. Again James says: *The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.* Passing final judgment on anyone violates the law by first putting ourselves above everyone else as their judge. Romans 2:1 says: *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, everyone who judges. For in passing*

judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. James is saying, first of all, that there's only one who's qualified to be a judge rendering that final verdict over his fellow man, and that's Jesus Christ. And again, 1 Timothy 4:1 says: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom.

Secondly, and perhaps even more germane, passing final judgment is making a claim that whoever we are judging is somehow beyond the grace of God. You know, consider the apostle Paul. Consider the apostle Paul compared to this rabidly anti-Christian monster that we knew before he was converted as Saul. By his own words, this is what he said in Acts 22, he said: *"Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him."* You know, if you and I were arrested and imprisoned by Saul, you know, if you and I got to see Stephen as the stones took his life, and we see this smirking Saul standing there *"watching over the garments of those who killed him,"* how easy would it have been for us to pass final judgment on Saul? How incredibly wrong would we have been? What if it was David that we judged as an adulterer and murderer? Or Matthew or

Zachaeus? They were hated tax collectors. Heck, if I ran into me in my 20s, I would have said this guy's hopeless. There's not a chance. You see, it is God alone who gets to write the final chapter in every one of our lives. And so to pass final judgment on our own is to fancy ourselves above God and above the law in the first place.

And finally we get to these last words of James in James 5:12, he says this, he says: *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.* You know, coming at the end of a long section of scripture describing the importance of patience, long suffering, and steadfastness, these words seem almost out of place, and many a commentator said we just don't get why he just suddenly went into this one particular area after the discussion we had just had, but you know, coming at the end of the entire book of James with all of its admonitions about the tongue, it makes perfect sense. Well, let me first point out that there are three different aspects of this type of the use of the tongue that we need to distinguish. I define them as cussing, cursing, and swearing.

Cussing I define as the use of coarse language, and believe it or not, the Bible expressly forbids that. Ephesians 5:4 says: *Let*

there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. This sort of language, it robs the speaker of the one thing that he's seriously looking for, and that's to be taken seriously. You know, having been in the trades for many, many years, I frequently ran into people who were somehow skilled at inserting certain four-letter words into everything. They couldn't say the word "Mississippi" without inserting a curse word in the middle of it. I've never known who that was supposed to impress, but it certainly didn't impress me. You really have no idea how profound an affect you have on those who are around you when you simply exercise control of your tongue in that manner. I was just reminded of this in a backward way many, many years ago when I was working as a cabinetmaker. I'd been working with a bunch of subcontractors and any of you guys who are in the trades, you know that subcontractors have language that is often somewhat less than pristine. And so I was working on the job and I was hanging out with these guys for about a week or so just getting to know them, and I had just done a three-hour installation of a whole series of cabinets, and I was standing there admiring my handiwork when I saw something instantly that made me realize and understand that I had to take it all apart, that it was no good. And so I was sitting there and I had my arms folded, stroking my chin, and I -- true confessions, I uttered a -- I said, "Oh," and I said a four-letter word that

starts with "S." As soon as I said that, the guy next to me jumps up and says, "He cursed! He cursed!" And he goes running down the hallway saying, "Hey, guys, I heard him, he cursed!" I had never given a second thought to that. I had never realized that my not cursing had made an impact on these people. I only realized it when they were accusing me of being just like them. It taught me a very powerful lesson. It told me that if you are a Christian, understand that people are watching and listening to you far more intently than you realize.

But you know, as opposed to cussing, there is something that is far worse, and that we call cursing. Cursing is the calling down of harm or evil on someone. Perhaps the most common curse in our culture is by far the worst, it is to say G-D someone or something. It's perhaps the most dreadful words that human beings could ever utter. It is calling on God to cast someone or something into hell itself. And again, because the scope of it is so common in our culture, it has been bled of its seriousness. Consider that if God says we will be judged for every idle word we say, how much greater the judgment on words that we are actively aggressively disobedient and blasphemous. Consider how far the culture is, that it sees those words as no big deal.

And finally there is swearing. James 5:12 says: *But above all, my*

brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may for the fall under condemnation. What James is referring to here is the practice that the Pharisees had done and had become very common in that day. You see, James' flock, they understood one of the Ten Commandments was not to take the Lord's name in vain and that to swear by the name of God was a direct violation of Exodus 20:7 which says: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." However, the Pharisees had a work around for that as well. See, they would never swear by the name of God. Instead, they would swear by heaven or they would swear by the earth or some other aspect of God's creation. What James is insisting on here is exactly what Christ himself demanded when he forbade the very same kind of oath taking. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 5:33. He said: "Again you have heard that it was said of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." So James and Jesus are both saying, you know, it's not a matter of swearing

properly. There's no proper way to invoke God as a means of bolstering the truth of the seriousness of your claim. Jesus just says flat out you've got no business going there at all in the first place. Both Jesus and James speak to the reasons why people often feel the need to swear. It's to bolster their claims of seriousness or truthfulness. I know, I did it myself. I did it from the earliest ages on. As a youngster, one of my favorite sayings was, "Cross my heart and hope to die." That's certainly innocent enough. But to what end is that? It's to make somebody think I'm serious or I'm really, really truthful now. Later on it developed into well, "I swear on the Bible." For me that was a big deal. When that sort of lost its "umph," it was, "I swear on a stack of Bibles." That's what I used to say all the time. You know, that's not what God is looking for. Jesus and James both just cut to the chase when it comes to stating what a God glorifying attitude towards this type of speech should be. He says this: *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.* Now, James is just repeating what Jesus has already said, and Jesus didn't just speak the truth, Jesus was the truth. You know in John 14:6, it says: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* God had left heaven itself, came to earth, lived a perfect life we were all

supposed to live and then He offered that life up for my sin. And so by placing my faith in his sacrifice, I am then credited with his righteousness. Romans 4:5 says: *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.* This is the gospel that's been entrusted to us. God tells us that we have been made his ambassadors, trusted with that message. 2 Corinthians 5:20: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* Now, if you are a person whose "yes" is not really yes and whose "no" is not really no, then how can you expect your message of Christ to be taken seriously?

You know, I cringe when I see some Hollywood celebrity gushing about how much she loves Jesus when her life and her tongue don't even begin to match up. Actually what I do is I discern the hypocrisy but I resist passing final judgment, because all of us are guilty of hypocrisy, and if she really is a Christian, then she's like me, she's a work in progress and only God has the ability to pass final judgment on her. In situations like that, it's best just to bite your tongue. I've been a Christian long enough to know that my tongue can very easily get me into a heap of trouble. James says, *It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.* The reason why James ends all of his admonitions about the tongue

with a simple statement: *But let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no* is because it sums up every other statement he's made about the tongue. Listen. A person who is swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath is someone who can handle the truth whether he or she is delivering it or receiving it, because the work that God has done on his tongue is inside-out in his heart rather than outside-in in his circumstance. It's only because he's received a spiritual heart transplant is he able to effectively bridle his tongue. He speaks and acts as those who will be judged by the law of freedom because he knows that Christ has already paid the full price of his sin, and he knows that he is now freed to pursue Christ not with the empty heart of religion but with a full heart of a slave who's been set free. He recognizes that the tongue is a fire, that it is capable of wonderful praise and monstrous destruction. He sees the evil of speaking evil against one another but he also understands his obligation to speak the truth in love, and all of this is summed up in one simple statement: *Let your "yes" be yes, and your "no" be no.* Now, if you can do that, then you've got control over your tongue. But James 3:8 says: *No man can tame the tongue.* This is something you cannot do on your own. This is something that I cannot do on my own. Now, if we could do this, then the tongue would never have been such a problem, but we all know that it is. You see, controlling the tongue is not something that folks are just able to conjure up by any kind of

human effort. It is the supernatural fruit that grows in the heart that's been planted with the Holy Spirit of God himself. Such is the grace and the blessing that only those who have given themselves to Christ receive. They've received brand new hearts. They've had a heart transplant. And although nobody does it perfectly, James points out that these new hearts express themselves in tongues that give honor and glory to Christ, and once again, that's what we're here for. And so for the sake of, by the grace of, and through the power of Jesus Christ, let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no. Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for your word, I thank you for James, and I thank you for his focus on the tongue. Lord, if anything, one thing we see is this tongue is such a tiny organ and yet is so incredibly influential for good and for bad, it so clearly marks out our progress as believers and so clearly shows us where we are. And Father, I pray that as we look at our Christian lives, we might examine where our tongue is in the whole scheme of things, we would examine whether or not we are able to bridle our tongue. If we have success in that, if we have that measure of success that comes from the Holy Spirit living within us, giving us that grace, that strength, that peace, and that power, Father help us to understand the tongue is an indicator of our spiritual health and help us to act accordingly, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.