

# Unbridled Speech

*by Bryan Gibson*

Think about the purpose of a horse's bridle, and then read this passage: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26). Not sure you're guilty? Here are some examples of unbridled speech, right here in the *Epistle of James*.

**Claiming faith when your life says otherwise.** "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:14). Some folks say all the right things; they just don't practice them. They "believe" in Jesus; they've just got a funny way of showing it, or to be more precise, not showing it. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers [or talkers] only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

**Speech that reveals partiality or respect of persons.** "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8), whether your neighbor looks like you or not. Surely we know better than to judge according to the flesh, but if for some reason we don't, here's what the Lord says, through James: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...with partiality" (James 2:1). "...but if you show partiality, you commit sin..." (James 2:8-9). "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:12-13).

**Teaching that's done merely to impress others.** "Let not many of you become teachers" (James 3:1), especially "if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts" (James 3:14). If these are the things that motivate you, "do not boast and lie against the truth" (James 3:14), which is just another way of saying, "keep your mouth shut." Leave the teaching to the "wise and understanding among you," those whose conduct and speech demonstrate the "meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

**Praying for personal advantage.** "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3). That's a far cry from the prayer of our Savior, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 24:42). The Lord's will, not my personal gain or pleasure—that's what prayer is all about.

**Speaking evil of brethren.** "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law..." (James 4:11). Correct and rebuke brethren we must (James 5:19-20), but this goes way beyond that, to the point of contempt for our brethren.

**Boasting of great plans, with no mention of God.** "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16).

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, SLOW TO SPEAK, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). If you’re serious about bridling your tongue, that’s a good start.