

• *Two positive uses of the tongue*

**1. The tongue is like a horse**

**2. The tongue is like a rudder**

• *A small rudder controls the large boat*

• *Abigail's example – persuasive, encouraging, restoring and timely words*

• *Wise and optimistic words*

• *Confident words*

• *Gentle words*

• *Affectionate words*

• *Loving talk and forgiving words*

• *Shimei and David*

James wants us to know of the power of the tongue. He uses five illustrations. The first two are positive. They speak of the value of the tongue in steering us, in taking us where we should go.

1. **The tongue is like a horse.** He says: *'If we put bits of wood into the mouths of horses in order to get them to obey us, then we control the whole animal also'*<sup>1</sup>. A horse is useful for transport. It will take us where we want to go. But we control it by our control of its mouth.

2. **The tongue is like a rudder.** *'Look also at the ships. They are so great and they are pushed along by strong winds, yet they are steered in different directions by a very small rudder, making the ship go to wherever the wish of the pilots takes him'*<sup>1</sup>. So also the tongue also is a little part of the body but it boasts about great things<sup>2</sup>. James imagines a large boat. How can such a huge vessel be made to obey anyone's wish. It takes powerful winds to make it go anywhere. And yet it can be controlled. The small rudder of a large boat is the answer to the problem. Whoever controls the rudder controls the direction in which the boat is moving. It is the same with the tongue. Whoever controls his tongue controls the direction in which his life is moving.

Let us dwell on this point. Look at the talk of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. See how she uses such **persuasive** words. Look at the **encouraging** words of Jesus in (for example) Luke 12:32. Jesus knows about their anxiety but deliberately encourages them. Think of the **restoring** words that are implied and encouraged in Galatians 6:1. One of the great tests of our Christian lives is whether we can be used to restore another person to holiness, to Christian stability. We need to use **well-timed** words, and **accepting** words. Think of the way Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery<sup>1</sup> and Jesus' words to the woman of Luke 7:36–50 or John 12:3–8.

We are to use **wise** words, and **optimistic** words. Think of 2 Corinthians 4:13; Acts 27:25; Psalm 118:17. Words can destroy but they can also heal. We are to use **confident** words. Think how confident Paul is in God's power<sup>1</sup>. We are also to use **gentle** words. Most of the time Jesus was very gentle. He could be severe with unconverted religious leaders, but most of the time He was very gentle. Think of Matthew 11:28–30. We should learn to use **affectionate** words. Holiness is not severity; it is not repentance without faith; it is not legalism. It is mainly a matter of love. Love is seen in what we say and what we do: talking and walking.

Are you asleep with regard to the need for holiness? Some people take a long time to wake up to the need for love. Some think it is unimportant. Some think it is sentimentality. Some have 'lost their first love'. The fruit of the Spirit begins with love<sup>1</sup>. We are looking for a kingdom of love. Loving talk, loving communication, great friendliness. A people where everyone can see how we show love to one another. We need to use **forgiving** words. Think of the story of Shimei's cursing David. David's response is found in 2 Samuel 16. David has to flee Jerusalem because of Absalom's rebellion. This man Shimei comes along and starts cursing David. But David responds with sheer forgiveness. He is patient and tolerant. He finds peace in the thought that God has allowed what is happening. He knows he may not be guilty of what Shimei says; but he is guilty of things just as bad. He had not been a man of blood in connection with Saul, but he had been a man of blood in connection with Uriah! The best way of

<sup>1</sup> 3:3

<sup>1</sup> 3:4  
<sup>2</sup> 3:5

<sup>1</sup> John 8:10–11

<sup>1</sup> see Romans 8:31–39

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:22–23

overcoming your enemies is to make them your friends. Leave judgement to God. He will deal with your case if you leave it entirely to Him. If you take your own cause into your own hands you will deal with it badly.

• *Affectionate words*

We are to use **affectionate** words. It is important to show affection to our friends and relatives. Many people are fearful of expressing love. Maybe it is due to their background. Often our experiences as a child affect us. Paul once said<sup>1</sup> 'Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections... open wide to us also.' I remember once I gave a little boy in the Christian fellowship a toy car. The next Sunday morning he insisted on hugging me, holding both my hands, and not letting me go. You can win the affection of children and children are affectionate but adults 'grow out of it'. A pity! Are you afraid of showing affection? Many are afraid of affection. Why? Is it pride? When you give or receive affection you are becoming dependent. Is it past hurts? A tough childhood? Rejection as a child? It results in a culture that is more restrained in showing affection.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

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• *Paul's example of open affection towards those who attacked him*

In 2 Corinthians Paul had problems with his friends at Corinth. He was accused of insincerity and unreliability. Paul (a Jew) was different from the Corinthians (gentiles, Greeks). Maybe they misunderstood him. He had changed his plans several times. But when Paul is attacked he does not withdraw; he opens up his heart! Would you have withdrawn? Would you have criticized? Would you have gossiped? Paul makes bare his heart. He tells them more about himself. He pleads for openly-expressed, loving affection, free-flowing talk together<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:11-12; 10:15

• *'Control of the tongue' is not simply a matter of learning to be silent and saying nothing at all!*

I have run out of space! You could go on to think yourself of friendly words, bold words, challenging words, stimulating words, grateful words, motivating words. The tongue has great power to influence the whole of our life. The secret of godliness is to use the tongue aright. It is not just a matter of controlling the tongue so as to be silent! It is a positive thing. It is so rejoicing in God that positively good and gracious words spring easily out of our mouths. We notice at this point (i) that James does not go into any details. He does not tell us **how** to control the tongue. He simply implies that we, God's people, can do it if we give ourselves to doing so. (ii) His point so far is positive, not negative. 'Control of the tongue' is not simply a matter of learning to be silent and saying nothing at all! 'Control of the tongue' means using it for good and for God. The horse was a means of warfare (as long as you could control it). The boat was a means of transport and of doing business. We can go places and achieve things for God – if we can use the tongue skillfully.

• *'Control of the tongue' means using it for good and for God*



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