

James 1:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

Analysis

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. One who thinks himself religious (thrēskos, θρησκος) yet does not bridle (chalinagōgō, χαλιναγωγῶ) his tongue deceives (apatōn, ἀπατῶν) his heart; such religion is vain (mataios, μάταιος). James connects speech with authentic worship. Religious rituals devoid of controlled speech betray self-deception.

Reformed piety insists that orthodoxy must produce orthopraxy—especially in speech. The tongue reveals the heart; unchecked words undermine prayers, sacraments, and service. This prepares for the extended treatment of the tongue in chapter 3.

Historical Context

Diaspora congregations faced slander, gossip, and divisive teaching. James, as Jerusalem's overseer, knew that reckless words destroy communities faster than persecution. His warning parallels Paul's insistence that love is more than tongues or prophecy (1 Corinthians 13).

Jewish worship involved liturgy, fasting, and feast participation; James redefines acceptable worship as including ethical speech. This would challenge those who prided themselves on rituals yet harmed fellow believers with their words.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Where does your speech reveal self-deception about your spirituality?
2. What practices help you bridle your tongue throughout the day?
3. How can you use words this week to build up the vulnerable?

Interlinear Text

Εἷ	τις	δοκεῖ	θρησκὸς	εἶναι	ἐν	ὑμῖν,	μὴ
G1487	G5100	seem	religious	to be	among	you	not
		G1380	G2357	G1511	G1722	G5213	G3361
χαλιναγωγῶν	γλῶσσαν	αὐτοῦ	ἀλλ'	ἀπατῶν	καρδίαν		
and bridleth	tongue		but	deceiveth	heart		
G5468	G1100	G846	G235	G538	G2588		
αὐτοῦ	τούτου	μάταιος	ἡ	θρησκεία			
G846	this man's	is vain		religion			
	G5127	G3152	G3588	G2356			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 141:3 (Parallel theme): Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

Ephesians 4:29 (Parallel theme): Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

1 Peter 3:10 (Parallel theme): For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

Proverbs 19:1 (Parallel theme): Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

Ephesians 5:4 (Parallel theme): Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Psalms 34:13 (Parallel theme): Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Proverbs 10:31 (Parallel theme): The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.

Colossians 4:6 (Parallel theme): Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Proverbs 10:19 (Parallel theme): In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

James 1:22 (Parallel theme): But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.