

Peter 2:1 The Wearing Of Masks: And The Tongue!

Last week in 1 Peter we finished off chapter 1 with v22-25: 'By this shall all men know', I called it. And we saw from v22 that having been purified by Jesus' Blood and responding in obedience to His Truth, Peter explained another evidence of our genuine salvation: Love for the brethren! Yes John 13:33-34 "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples: If you have love one for another." Or as Peter puts it in v22 "So that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." And as another translation says, "Love from a pure heart." Even as Jesus himself taught in Matthew 5:8 "blessed other pure in heart for they shall see God." Not that our hearts are truly pure like that of Jesus, and yet because of Him, our intention can be! Yes our love for our brethren can come from a pure intent. When we are not after personal gain and with no hidden agenda. Yes like Jesus, we can love them selflessly. Even self-sacrificially!

And we saw also from John 13 Jesus said, "As I have loved you so you must love one another." He uses the word "must." It is an imperative. He gives us no choice in the matter. So we are to love our brethren even when they drive us crazy. Yes evidence of our true salvation is seen in our love for those who carry Christ's Name!

Then from v23 we saw those two kinds of seed. The "perishable and the imperishable": Those who are naturally born of the flesh, and those who are supernaturally born of the Holy Spirit inspired preaching of God's Word! That like "the grass and flowers of the field" the natural man "withers and falls." His life wears out, and comes to an end. But those born of the supernatural seed "the imperishable seed" like His Word, "will stand forever." He will not abandon us short of the gates of glory!

Such is the confidence and assurance that the believer in Christ and His message possesses. V25 That not only does "God's Word stand forever," but "this is the word that was preached to you." Neither God or His workings will ever perish. Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever." Yes our hope is built on nothing less than the unchanging Word of the Creator of the entire universe! So because He has loved us, we "must love one another, from the heart."

We pick up the letter in 1 Peter 2:1 and I have entitled this message 'The Wearing Of Masks: And the Tongue!' In v1 he again begins with that all important link word "Therefore." Or, in light of everything that I have just explained to you in v 22-25, this must be your response to these truths! Yes, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind."

Now Brothers and Sisters, last week's message from 1 Peter was called 'By this shall all men know', of course quoted from John 13:34-35. "By this all men know that my disciples if you have love one for another." And then Peter expounds upon Jesus' Own words saying, "love one another deeply, from the heart." But this list that we now have before us of course, while not purposefully placed in opposition by Peter to those words of love, this list is certainly opposed to everything which Jesus Himself and Peter taught of brotherly love. "Malice, Deceit, Hypocrisy, Envy, and Slander of every kind." And now let's remember, Peter has just told us that evidence of our true salvation is seen in how we "love one another deeply, from the heart." And I explained that this speaks of the purity of intention. And now he uses the words Malice. Deceit. Hypocrisy. Envy and Slander every kind.

But surely as he does so, he is warning us to beware, because this is what non-Christians are like. Yes? Because Christians are not like that. Well no! Peter is not writing this letter to non-Christians. If

he were, they wouldn't read it anyway because he has no authority over them anyway. No, he is not writing this letter to non-believers, but to believers. Yes, to those who do claim Christ. And since he says, "therefore rid yourselves," he is most likely addressing a specific issue here. But if not, he is addressing that tendency to which the "perishable seed," those parts of our old nature, which we continue to do battle with of our old life. Yes he's addressing that tendency to which the old person is so naturally drawn. If love for the brethren is a mark, an evidence of our genuine salvation, these other things, are evidences of those parts of hell, that continue to dwell in us! As I mentioned, those things are completely opposed to everything that Jesus Himself and Peter taught of brotherly love. Our loving like Jesus!

I'm actually going to begin with number three on the list. Hypocrisy, because it goes I believe, to the very heart of the matter. And also to that heart to which all the others point! In ancient times, there was a Greek actor, and his name in Greek was Hupocriteis. And his particular performance entailed the putting on, or the wearing of different kinds of masks. So much so, that to a large degree, his identity was kept from the audience. So they didn't know who this person really was. Here is where those sayings come from. That person is two faced. Or they seem to have many faces or masks. I wonder what mask they will be wearing today? People might say. So someone who is not what they portray themselves to be, was actually named after their famous father, as it were. Hupocriteis. The hypocrite! Listen to how the word is defined by the old Collins dictionary: 'The simulation or pretence of goodness. Feigning to be what one is not. One who hides his real nature. Concealment of his motives. An actor.' Hupocriteis! And again, let's remember, Peter is writing this to believers.

Beloved, I say these following things with all sensitivity. We need to ask ourselves, does this describe me in anyway? Am I guilty of wearing the mask of Christianity, while feigning to be that which I am not? Am I hiding my real nature? Am I concealing my real motives? Am I not what I profess to be? Dear friends, may I tenderly suggest, that we are all in danger of being guilty of these things at times.

Basically, we can do this in two ways. Firstly, we can exhibit all of those Christian characteristics while we are out among believers, but then when we are at home, the real person comes out. So our mask, is for all of those brethren in Christ to see! It can be more important to us to be seen as Christian, than to actually be Christian. So it's all about people seeing what I do. Not who I am! And the other mask we can wear, is that mask that we put on when we are in the presence of unbelieving family, friends, or co-workers or club mates. In effect we take off, (or we cover up or we hide) the marks of Christ, because we are ashamed of the scars in His hands and feet. Those very things which paid the price for our forgiveness of sin and our reconciliation with God!

Beloved, Peter wasn't perfect. He understood hypocrisy. He understood weakness. He denied knowing Jesus three times, even calling curses down upon his own head the third time he did so. At one point he was happy to eat and drink with the non- Jewish Christians, but when the bigwigs turned up, he separated himself from them, worried about what they would say. Peter rebuked him for that! Yes he understood hypocrisy and weakness.

May I suggest, that is why he warns us against it here. You know one of the most common accusations hurled at Christians is that we are a bunch of hypocrites. We say one thing and do another. Yes we are a bunch of mask wearers! In Romans 2:24 Paul writes "God's name is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you." Now I've explained the idea of blasphemy before. And while yes using the Lords Name in vain is part of it, the idea of blasphemy, is more about how we live than how we speak. That's what Paul means, when he quotes Isaiah 52. The sin really is about hypocrisy. The wearing of masks. Pretending to be something which we are not. Whether it is hiding who we are as believers amongst the world, or putting on a show, when we are among the

body of Christ, His church. Either way, there is a pretence that is involved. Whereas Jesus said 'let your yes be yes, and your no be no.' Or in other words, be a man or woman of your word. Be a person of integrity. Perhaps, be who you claim to be. Mean what you say and say what you mean. Don't wear a mask!

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice." Now the word malice means ill will toward another. To have spite. The disposition to injure others. To have criminal intent! Now friends, we may not have criminal intent, but could it possibly be that at times we feel ill will or spite toward another? Though we not want to physically injure others, could our tongues, possibly be predisposed to injure others, even a little? The final thing on this list that Peter says is "rid yourselves of every kind of slander." To slander someone means to make a false or malicious statement about them. To defame their character by the spoken word. Spiteful gossip!

Brothers and sisters, I don't know about you, but I find these things challenging both personally spiritually, and also in practical terms. In the living of it. Who has not been guilty of the throwaway, thoughtless, hurtful comment? Listen to what James has to say about the tongue in James 1:26: "if anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. James 3:2: "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is the perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." Can you see what he is saying? Yeah we all screw up. We all can have foot in mouth disease. But if we are on guard against such things, yes if we can keep the tongue in check, we will also keep a tight rein on the rest of our lives!

James continues in v3-10 with three powerful imageries of how a very small thing can govern and control and set the course of large, even vast objects or things! James 3:3-10 "when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make their move, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be."

Brothers and Sisters, as most of you now I have been around horses for many years. And I can tell you that some horses with a bit in their mouth, you can make them spin on the spot, with the tiniest bit of pressure. 3/4 of a tonne of a horse can be controlled by the smallest thing. And think of the gigantic ships today compared to those vessels when James wrote this letter. They would, I dare say, be 100 times as big in every way. Perhaps even bigger. And yet they are still controlled with what would seem to be an almost insignificant steering mechanism. And what about fires? What of a bushfire? We all know way too much of the realities of fires in Australia. Yes they are all too real. We all know what an out of control bushfire can do. And yet all beginning with one small spark!

And Brothers and Sisters, I'm going to add one more to these three examples. What of a virus? Something which is even invisible to the naked eye. And yet in the hands of God, and in the ignorance and vanity of men, can bring even the whole world to its knees! Well similarly, James is warning us, that if the tongue is not bridled, not kept in check by its owner through the study, the

filter, and the application of God's Word to the believer's life, then their salvation for eternity, can also be set on fire. And they perish along with the slander of their own misspoken words!

Again friends, I find these things so profoundly challenging because these are not about abstract theological ideas. James is all about practical Christianity. How we can do what we profess. Or in other words, if you want to know what a Christian looks like in real terms, take a look at the book of James. Look again at v6 of James 3: "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, setting the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." The whole passage is a bunch of flashing warning lights isn't it. Beware of the dog. Enter at your own risk. Trespassers will be prosecuted. Or as the old westerns used to say: Private property. Trespassers will be shot!

The whole idea is to be on guard. To keep a tight rein. To be careful with the words we use. Look at verse 8b: "it's a restless evil full of deadly poison." They are powerful words aren't they. "A restless evil. Full of deadly poison." He doesn't hold back, afraid of hurting their feelings, no. It's more important to James that everyone gets the message, than it is that their feelings be hurt. Again, look at the God inspired, yes the "God breathed words": "Full of deadly poison." V9-10 "with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be."

Friends again, it is clear that James is addressing an issue here among the church. Because like all of God's gifts, the tongue is an amazing tool. And yet like all of God's gifts, it can be used for both good and evil. We can encourage, we can comfort, we can support, each other. We can build one another up, and guide each other in the things of God's Kingdom when we are stumbling and going astray! But the other part of this equation, is that with thoughtless, careless, harsh and hurt filled words, we can even destroy one another! It can happen in our marriages. It can happen in our families. And it can happen amongst the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, His church. Yes we can encourage and lift one another up, but we can also truly turn each other's joy into mourning!

Friends, how easy it is to give a word of encouragement. A word that enhances a person's life and walk with their Lord. And yet how often do we do it? Those times when we should spend the currency of our words, we often hold back. And yet often, when we should keep our tongue bridled, we spend our opinions and words with reckless abandon. Yes Beloved, it is easy to speak a word of support or appreciation or encouragement. And yet how equally easy is it to launch a grenade of spite! Oh sometimes it's a careless word perhaps not intended to do harm.

But most of the time we know exactly what we're saying, and with what intent we do speak. "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father in heaven. And with it we curse men. Brothers, this should not be." What does this spell out? Nothing but hypocrisy. The wearing of masks. "My brothers, this should not be." Peter speaks also of "deceit" here. Well this one is quite simple isn't it. The act of misleading a person. Fraud. Oh such things don't happen among believers do they? Well if James is writing about it, then it was a problem! You know, the terrible reality is, that some of the greatest acts of fraud and deception that I know of, and have even been personally affected by, have come about through those who claim to be Christian. Livelihoods and retirements stolen away. And all under the banner of Jesus!

I truly believe that there is a special place in hell for all of these people. Lest they repent and make amends. It is hypocrisy of the highest order. These people are as Satan coming as angels of light. But God says, "Vengeance is mine says the Lord. I will repay." Yes their outcome will be the same as that of the master that they serve!

The last of these warnings which we encounter today is “envy.” It means to begrudge another’s success or good fortune. To feel jealous of! In the Tenth commandment God calls it “Covetousness.” And we read in Exodus “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife or his manservant or maidservant or his ox or his donkey, or anything that is thy neighbour’s.” Years ago when we looked at the 10 commandments, I explained that this commandment is not placed last because it is the least important or least of a problem, no. Because it actually underlines them all. I know that Allison actually has a bookmark which says as much. Because you see, having a heart that doesn't covet, speaks of a person who is contented with their lot from the hand of God. That person acknowledges that all things come from you oh Lord. My times are in Thy hand. My times are in Thy hand.

Many young people today feel the need to have the house that their parents have taken many houses and a lifetime of hard work to get to. Why is that? Is it an envious spirit? A covetous heart? I don't know. But perhaps so. For many today the idea of living within their means doesn't even come into the equation. And they get themselves into financial ruin. And then apparently, it's someone else’s responsibility to get them out of it!

Now I know it's always been this way, but we do seem to be so driven by materialistic desire today, don't we? Gone it seems are the days of a modest contented lifestyle. Yes “Therefore rid yourselves of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

So Brothers and Sisters, how do we tie these things together this morning? Well perhaps it's simply like this: We are called to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” by Jesus. So we are the ones who are to season this perishing world around us, with the flavour of the saving gospel, of the Lord Jesus Christ! We are to shine the light of the gospel, into the darkness and emptiness of the lives of those people that we love, who don't know Jesus. But if we are to do this effectively and in honour of God, we must throw away our masks. And keep a tight rein on our tongue! And beware and be aware of those warnings that we have been given today.

Let's pray!