

The Just shall live by Faith

Volume 1 - Study 9 James 3:17, Meekness of Wisdom is from Above ...pure, peaceable, gentle ...yielding Fruit of Righteousness

C. Ronald Johnson, Christian Wilderness Press: Heaven's wisdom yields not '**a tongue of fire**', James 3:6, or '**envy and strife**', 3:16. But rather like '**bit and bridle**', it controls the whole body, 3:2. It '**inspires not many masters or teachers**', 3:1. Out of the mouth can come '**blessing and cursing**', 3:10. '**Does a fountain yield water salt and fresh, sweet and bitter**', 3:11?

James 3**3:1) My brethren, be not many masters [i.e. teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.**

The word ‘receive’ is more correctly *take hold of*. That is, *to take hold of* a position as “teacher” is also *to take hold of* a godly responsibility that carries with it more severity in the judgment than is scheduled for others of God’s people.

The word ‘condemn’ means *to decide* against *evil*. James could have used a similar word for *to decide* which could be used generally with either *good or bad* connotation; that is, it could have also been used to *esteem* (i.e. *to decide* toward the *good*). But in this instance he is not speaking of any good, and so he chose the former word for *emphasis*.

Note, then, the word that James used which points toward *condemnation*. All Christians are *responsible for their actions under the word that is used in this verse* by James, just as all Christians are *esteemed* (i.e. the other word) in our good actions.

A “teacher” (regarding God and His things), then, has *taken hold of* the “possibility” (or even “probability”) of ‘**the greater condemnation**’; this is why the apostle begins his topic with this word. Therefore, he begins with a stern warning to all God’s people.

3:2) For in many [other] things [besides wanting to be teachers] we offend all [the high things of God for His church]. If any man offend not in [or by his] word, the same is a perfect [i.e. ‘complete’] man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

The overwhelming majority of Christians take this passage to be about their own speech and their own words. However, for the word ‘in’ within the phrase ‘in word’ the meaning is *fixed* or *stable* (i.e. *fixed or stable* ‘word’). James speaks of the *fixed* words of God, the *stable* words of Scripture. He speaks of the godly ministry of God’s Word. He speaks not of our general conversations, even if those conversations have a spiritual or religious topic. I repeat: James is speaking of *the godly teaching of the Word*.

Let me rewrite the verse more clearly as to the original: ‘Because many [Christians] stumble in all [i.e. the *entirety* of God’s things]: [but] if anyone stumbles not, rather is fixed [i.e. as God’s words are *fixed*] in his speaking [of God’s words], then he is a complete [i.e. an accomplished] man, capable also to bridle the whole body.’

In even other words: If he has to some large degree mastered his tongue...as he walks and works in his (or her) God-ordained work...then such an accomplished person is likely to have pretty good control of the rest of his body.

And...since we Christians *stumble* so often in the things of God (i.e. ‘in many things we offend all’) then what we need more is ‘to bridle’ ourselves; and the more difficult part of ourselves are our tongues.

3:3) Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

The word ‘obey’ is more correctly *to convince*: ‘Behold, we throw bridles onto the horses’ mouths *to convince* them of us.’ In other words, a ‘bit’ and/or halter is to convince a horse that its human master controls him. But much more so, it is to give assurance unto (i.e. *to convince*) a well trained horse that the master (in knowing what he is doing) is safely controlling both himself and the horse, even while working his work.

Consider any of the many TV shows that you have watched when horse and rider seem as one unit. The well trained horse, in knowing his master, feels secure within real confidence of the master. This is the word-picture that James is painting. In those days, travel

had everything to do with beasts of burden in every kind of circumstance, and the beast had to have the right kind of confidence in his master for the master to accomplish any meaningful work. Moreover, it is the master's duty to train the horse to the point of the horse being *convinced* whenever the bridle is put on him for a work.

Therefore, when the Lord's **'bit'** is 'inserted for a time of God working His *fixed* **'word'** through His messenger unto His people', then the messenger's tongue will be coordinated (i.e. **'bridled'**) unto the work at hand, and nothing of the messenger himself will be inserted into the work. James is speaking from his experience and *by God's direct unction to him as he speaks*.

If we would take James' words to us and Jesus' words to his disciples as seriously as those words were intended by God then we would shake and tremble within the proper 'fear of the Lord'. Alas, this is not the case, which is why James wrote to us and why Jesus taught his disciples. God's compassion to us in these matters affects us far more than does His warnings, and the compassion to us in these matters should be making it clear to us of how childish we are in trying to be "spiritually mature". The danger is real to both those who would be "teachers" and to the Church...and it explains our sad condition of 'being in the world, but not of the world', even as we *are too much like the world*.

3:4) Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth [i.e. at the impulse of the wheelman].

The wheelman that controls the messenger (when God is working His *fixed* word) is God. However, the wheelman in charge of the tongue is the individual within whom the tongue resides...which is why James is so adamant in speaking to God's messengers and to all of God's people that wish to be used of God with "spiritual" words.

3:5) Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter [i.e. a forest or a large assemblage of things that can burn] **a little fire kindleth!**

More correctly: 'Behold how similar: a little fire can kindle a forest!' And the more eloquent the speaker...or more scandalous the gossip...or more manipulating the leader...then the more does the tongue of each such person boast of strength and influence over others. The great orator on the political stage is envied by other politicians.

3:6) And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of [i.e. is 'under' the influence of] **hell.**

More correctly to the original: 'And the tongue is a fire. The world [is] unjust. So [we] designate the tongue as fixed in our members [which can] defile the whole body and set on fire a [person's] natural course [in the world]. And [the tongue] sets on fire [i.e. ignites things] under the influence of gehenna [i.e. for the purposes of and with consequences toward gehenna].

Dear reader, it seems that James is comparing injustice (i.e. when injustice entered the world) with the tongue of man. In other words, when injustice because of sin entered the world, it had the power of contaminating and defiling the world. Thus, James indicates, "It is the same with the tongue amidst a person's own personal world."

Nowadays society thinks that injustice is "not so awful" as to destroy many people and an entire world (but it can and it does). Therefore, to society the tongue seems "not so totally awful" as to defile and even destroy many persons and the person in whom the tongue resides.

Here is the total foolishness of our world: We have decided that we must "live with a certain amount of injustice". Indeed, our judicial system is so broken, so out of sync, and works mainly for those employed in the system...that we expect it to work only slightly and to work in a contorted manner. So when we Christians tell little white lies and blow up at our children or spouse, we take it to be "only natural; after all, we are not perfect."

Ah, but James is speaking not just of the tongue, but of the tongue when it is used *in teaching the fixed things of God*. If all of us misuse the tongue, and we do, then how much more does God hold the person responsible who is in a position of *teacher of the fixed things of God*?

3:7) For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

More correctly to the original: ‘Because the whole of the natural production of wild beasts and birds and serpents and [things] in the sea is tamed.’ The root of the word ‘tame’ is ancient, having to do with *accessible for use* or *to be used*.

‘And also tamed by [or within] the human natural production.’ In other words, not only did God set the beasts, birds, etc. into productivity...each for its own species...but also for *general accessibility and use* by men. Moreover, many beasts, birds, etc. have been adapted and set within ‘tamed’ species by men for *even more accessible usage*.

Note that the entirety of beasts, birds, etc., is in a controlled setting: 1) they were placed by God in the earthly environment ‘tamed’ and 2) some were further ‘tamed’ by men in man’s environment.

Ah, but what of the tongue of man?

James says, ‘**My brethren, be not many masters** [i.e. teachers], **knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.**’ Note the ‘we’; the Apostle James knows of which he speaks. I wonder how many times the apostle had experienced God’s judgmental eye gazing down upon him, brooding about the apostle in those times when James inserted some of his own words and ideas right into the *teaching of God’s words*.

3:8) But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil [i.e. worthless], full of deadly poison.

Perhaps James speaks from his own experience about how if in the first instance the tongue is worthless, then how much more in the extreme instance is the tongue deadly and poisonous. I do not criticize James, for he is like Paul when Paul claimed that he was the ‘chief of sinners’. This, then, emphasizes just how much the danger is toward a Christian when finally he stands before God in the Judgment. Therefore, here is James’ dire warning to the many Christians who consider themselves ‘teachers of the Word’. Does the Apostle James trust his own tongue? NO!

3:9) Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. (!!!)

How much stronger in words can the apostle be in how we often misuse our tongues... thinking that we can have both sweet and sour pouring forth from our lips!

3:10) Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. (!)

Ah, but we do! ‘**For in many things we offend all.**’ It is our dilemma. Yet, so much more it is the dilemma of the apostles and teachers because they are held to the greater standard, and thus to the greater judgment.

3:11-12) Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so [therefore] can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

The questions answer themselves. Bitter and sweet and salt and fresh water do not spring from the same source. Thus, the apostle tells us that no person’s tongue is *ever truly sweet and/or fresh*. So how can an apostle, much less any teacher, much less any Christian properly speak forth any of God’s Words?

Every word of man, even the words of God given-as-prophecy to a prophet, are tainted with the cursed tongue of fallen man, even as words come forth off the prophet’s tongue.

Ah, but God is able to strike those tainted words purely into the tainted heart of any man, woman, or child ...Christian man, woman, child or not.

James thinks little of himself. And he thinks little of Christendom's teachers. Ah, but *he thinks infinitely high of his Master's ability to do His work.*

3:13) Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

'Is there any wise, with endued knowledge, among us? If so, show it forth out of...'

This is similar in many respects to Jesus' words '**Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.**' (Matthew 13:25)

Continuing with 3:13, '...out of good behavior [i.e. speech and action] his works [for God] with meekness of [this type] wisdom [which wisdom I wish to impart to you],' says James. How many, then, are the teachers that fit Jesus' definition in his words? Is the teacher to be as the '**scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven**'?

Do we have too many teachers? I do not know. That is a question for the heart of each teacher, and for the heart of each person desiring to be a teacher.

3:14) But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not [in teaching], and lie not against the truth.

'But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts [against any of the brethren], glory not [in teaching the *fixed* words of God].'

And '**lie not against the truth.**' What does this mean? Every tongue is tainted, unruly, untamed; yet, it can speak God's words when God gives the occasion and the unction for it. However, God does not do so for the person with a bitter, envying, and strident heart. If in such a condition, a Christian should never even consider the speaking of God's words for God. Judgment waits, because such speech amounts to '**a lie against the truth.**' Indeed, it is using *true words to lie against the truth.* And often God's people are thereby led away from *the truth.*

3:15) This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Such 'wisdom' (even if it is combined with correct knowledge) is not from above '**but is earthly, sensual, devilish**'. In other words, this *wisdom* is *toward gehenna* (3:6). The words may be true, but the heart of such a person uses the tongue to '**lie against the truth**'; and often such a person is unaware of what he is doing and of its peril.

3:16) For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Do not even the demons know the scriptures? Can they not recognize Jesus? And yes, they surely fear God! Yet, amid all of their knowledge from scripture and all of their observations of the saints, there is '**confusion and every evil work**' that they intend toward God's people. The scriptures warn about the demons, for such results can be worked even in the church by the demons.

Yet, James is not speaking of demons, but of Christians. We should not be doing such work for the demons, should not unknowingly be joining in their work. This very thing is James' concern for the churches and for the teachers in their walk before God. James (indeed, all of the apostles) had seen too much of this sort of thing. Moreover, each apostle-writer of scripture emphasized the same concern.

3:17) But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

This is like Paul's wonderful chapter on 'love'. Here is the kind of person with the kind of heart and the kind of standing before the Lord who could be chosen of God as a 'teacher'. However, many such men and women were not teachers, but instead were chosen to be martyrs and such; for God only uses the pure ones (ones sanctified by Him) for His many purposes...purposes which gain for Him honor as He sends out His sent-ones (sometimes sent out into peril).

Was not Peter sifted as wheat? Was not Job set up by God as a victim at the hand of

Satan? These and so many others were victorious in a limited way.

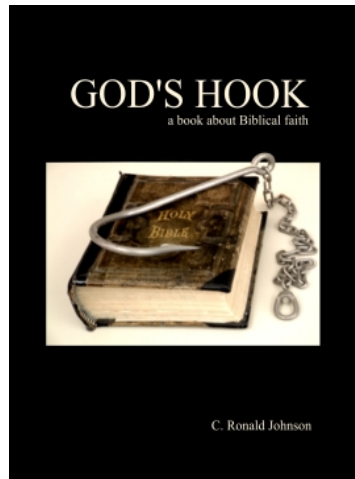
But what about Jesus? Constantly he was in the crosshairs of Satan from the beginning of his service to the Father to the end of that glorious service. He is the only man that beat Satan, the only man while walking the soil of this earth who completely embarrassed the king of this world. *Satan was defeated by a man...* a man sent to set men free from Satan's wiles...men of the Adamic race who accept the free offer and accept the One who paid the Bloody Price for true freedom.

3:18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Here is what God is looking for from a true 'teacher'. He is looking for fruit of righteousness to be discovered in the students studying under the true 'teacher'. How must such righteous seed be sown so that righteous fruit may eventually hang from righteous branches? It must be sown in peace...peace of the sower and peace of the student accepting such seed. What kind of peace is it? It is the kind of peace that issues forth of the Prince of Peace.

This, in fact, is *making peace* among the brethren who apply themselves to study the words of such 'teachers of the Word'. Therefore, '**blessed are the peacemakers**'. Teachers, sowers, students, brethren: these are the ones seeking this kind of peace: men, women, boys, and girls. Ah, but the One working all of it in each brother and sister is Almighty God: the Author of our Salvation and Father to the Son who served amidst life, death, and resurrection...who serves at the right hand of the Father until his time comes to arise and conquer.

These are short Bible studies by C. Ronald Johnson at Christian Wilderness Press



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