

"Schoolmarms?"

James 3:1-12, Part One

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"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 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. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 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 hell. 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: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 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 can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." (Jas 3:1-12 AV)

I preached on this text back in 1994, in a three part series on the soil of peace. But this is a new sermon, created out of material from that one, with new material and new applications.

James is wisdom literature of the New Testament. Just as the Wisdom literature of the OT gives us applications of the Law of Moses and the wisdom of creation, so the wisdom literature of the New Testament gives uniquely New Testament applications. I will speak of the wisdom that is according to the world: that is sensual, devilish. At this time I expect to bring two more messages from chapter 3, but it might be more than that.

James' theme is that the faith that saves is a living faith. This is James' phrase, and I do not shrink to use it, although it has been twisted by people like Norman Shephard and the Federal Vision people to something quite different than what James speaks. I need to say that to distance myself from them. There is justification before God in heaven, and that is accomplished when Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God and therefore is able to purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" We are purged from our dead works to serve the living God because of the offering up of

the blood of Christ, once for all.

The figure of a living body is apt. We see a dead body and we say "The man is dead." Why do we say that he is dead? because he does not move; he does not breathe; there is no response to pain, or pleasure; there is no brain activity; there is no body warmth; etc., you get the picture. There is no life; hence no sensitivity to the world.

Yet none of these things are life. We would not say that movement is life. Neither is body warmth. Neither is air going in or out of the lungs. We can conceive of these things taking place where there is no life; No amount of artificial stimulation of these things can produce life; when the life is gone, these things cease; trying to bring them back will not bring the life back, but at the same time; they always accompany, and are the evidence of life. They are not the source of life. Jesus settled the question once for all when He said, Ecclesiastes, one of the books of wisdom in the OT, says at death, "The body returns to the earth, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

So it is with faith. Good works are not faith. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc., are not faith. All of these things may be imitated, more or less successfully. No amount of effort to produce these things will bring forth faith; but their absence indicates death.

James, always imminently practical, continues with down-to-earth application of his doctrine. Let us look at the words of the portion we read a few minutes ago. (James 3)

I. We are commanded not to be a bunch of schoolmasters. vs. 1. In Matthew 23:7,8: the Pharisees loved to be called "Rabbi, Rabbi" How much misery has been caused in the churches down through the ages because of this spirit!

- A. This does not mean that teachers, pastors, etc., have not been set in the church, or that we are not to heed their good instruction. It does not mean that Christians are not to edify and exhort one another. It has more to do with the spirit and quality of that exhortation.
- B. He is speaking of the censuring that comes of the flesh, in pride and self-righteousness. "We are all apt, but the itch must be killed." --Manton.
- C. Greater condemnation
 1. From humans: our attitude turns to our own hurt.
 2. from God: We will be judged by the measure we measure by.
 3. Increases our own shame: when we need correction.
- D. Censuring is an act of power. We are assuming authority over another one when we reprove them; think about it: "By what authority do you do this?" was the question put by the Pharisees, and Jesus did not dodge the question. It was a good question, for the Bible is full of warnings against self-appointed prophets: those who prophesy without being called; and run without being sent.

We know this instinctively: "You are not the boss of me," is a common expression on the playground, and censuring is the cause of a great many quarrels among children. See Romans 14:4 "Who are you to judge another man's servant." When someone sets out to rebuke me, they are putting me into subjection to them. There are those who have the right to rebuke me: but all such authority is limited:

I am academic dean at New Geneva, and have a right to correct the instructors. I have only very slightly exercised that duty and then only in connection with the Academic Affairs Committee. The principal at a Christian school has a right to correct faculty and staff. He would have no jurisdiction or authority at TCRC. We all instinctively resent a usurpation of authority, and will resist it. That's why the censuring tongue is such a potent sower for strife and wickedness. The devil himself is called the "Accuser of the Brethren," and some of the devil's finest work is done in the name of righteousness.

The state has no right to tell the minister what to preach, or how worship is to be regulated: it took a thousand years of debate and strife and conflict before this principle could be established.

- E. In fact, you could say that the spirit of AntiChrist lurks in the wisdom which is of the world, sensual, devilish We oppose our wisdom to God's wisdom. Because Jesus Christ is the word and wisdom of God, AntiChrist sets himself in opposition specifically to Jesus Christ, and generally to everything known of God in heaven and in earth by any means whatsoever.

AntiChrist has his books, his experience, his religious affections, his system of righteousness, his religious orders, his ministers of light, his code of laws which are at odds with the law of God, although may quote the law of God as Satan did to our Lord at His temptation. He sets himself against the knowledge of God everywhere that knowledge of God appears.

The wisdom from below is empowered by the flesh, for it's fruits derive from the flesh, according to Galatians 5. The natural man can no more acquire the wisdom of God than a toad can sing the songs of the angels. This is the reason that James tells us to ask wisdom from God.

II. The tongue is the chief culprit here.

- A. The tongue is a great power: for good or for evil. The finest Christian thinkers have recognized this, and insisted upon freedom to preach the gospel, because of this power. This power must be left to the people, if political freedom is to be maintained, but it must be used responsibly or both the power and the freedom will be taken away. We will not long let a man have freedom do bear arms if he uses that freedom to shoot people down randomly in the street. Freedom of speech is a far greater power than the right to bear arms. Both are a great threat to

tyranny, unless they are used irresponsibly. Both weapons must be used with skill, with knowledge, and with proper restraint.

B. No man is perfect. It does not take any brains to find fault with your neighbor. All have sinned. The evidence for this is found both within and without.

C. The tongue is the thermometer of the soul. To be able to control the tongue is the mark of spiritual growth. If you cannot control what you say, then you cannot control the rest of your body. You are out of control. Do not minimize this, for what we read here is the very word of God: James proves this by several illustrations:

1. The bit in horses mouths: turns the whole horse.
2. The rudder of a ship.
3. The fire kindled by a small match.

D. The tongue is a "world" of iniquity. A universe of sin. We break every one of the Ten Commandments with the tongue. That is why unbridled freedom of speech is a license to commit every sin. Men can commit crimes with the tongue as well as with the rest of the body. If filthy speech is allowed, then it will not be long before adultery, fornication, and other perversities will destroy the society. Humanistic freedom always means the liberty to transgress the law of God.

E. "Who decides," is always the objection. The Law of God decides. But people disagree on what that means? So, what is new? People disagree on what insanity is, but it is entered as a defense over and over again. People disagree on what murder is, what theft is, what conflict of interest is, what protecting the environment is.

F. Physical abuse can scar the body; verbal abuse scars the soul, often for a lifetime.

1. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks: A good man brings forth good things.
2. The unsanctified tongue is an open sepulchre. Defiles everything around it.
3. Only God can tame the tongue. Easier to tame the lion and the bear. How many husbands; how many wives; how many children have known the lash of the unsanctified tongue. How rotten we are to one another with the things that we say! How much we need the mercy of God. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, the wise man said.

III. James is not saying that it is wrong to speak; no, the tongue is called the glory of the man in Ps 30:12 To the end that [my] glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

A. He speaks of the source: the fountain, which is the heart.

1. Jesus said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A man may cry "Fire" in a crowded meeting room. It may be good, if the building is on fire. If not, it is an evil act.

2. The tongue can be silent in an evil cause, and may speak in an evil cause; It may be silent in a good cause, and it may be speak in an evil cause.

3. It is not the heart that decides, but the spirit and the work of God. "The preparations of the heart of man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord," another of the wisdom books of the OT speak.

B. The fountain can only yield one kind of water; good, or bad. We do not say--well, there is only 2% human excrement in the well water; it is 98% ok. We would not drink it, for we know that some things are deadly in minute quantities. It is that way with some books; with some sermons; with some religious movements. No well water is perfectly pure, but wisdom requires that we be able to discern what is allowable, and what is deadly.

1. It is good to bless God; but it is hypocrisy if we curse men, who in the image of God. "Love your neighbor," is the commandment: not an abstraction: your neighbor is the guy next door; the guy lying on the road; the fellow you know who needs help from you. "Kind" = useful.

2. The fruit of the fig tree is figs; not olives. If you want to have olives, then you must be an olive tree. You must be changed. The only fruit that is acceptable to God is the fruit of the spirit, described in Galatians 5. But the flesh, natural ability, cannot bear this fruit. Those who trust in themselves will never bear the fruit of the Spirit, because the flesh only produces the fruit of the flesh: wrath, strife, sedition, heresy, etc.

3. James' readers knew the writings of Paul and the Gospels. They knew what Jesus taught.

"Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (Joh 6:26-28 AV)

We must believe on Christ and be changed by His Spirit; our hearts need to be renewed by the Spirit of God; This is the beginning of wisdom, for Jesus Christ is the One who came down from earth to give life and light to the world and John tells us.

We will continue this next time.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.