**BOOK OF JAMES CHAPTER 3**

**JAMES 3:1-18**

In JAMES Chapter 1 we learned that genuine faith is demonstrated by how we respond to trials and adversity. JAMES Chapter 2 emphasized that genuine faith is revealed by our actions, by our obedience to what God tells us to do. Here in Chapter 3 we’ll see further litmus tests as to whether our faith in Christ is genuine or not. Let me go ahead and read the entire chapter and then we’ll go back and discuss in more detail…

“1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged (by God) with greater strictness (we Bible teachers are held strictly accountable to God for what we teach others). 2 For we all stumble in many ways (we all stumble at times, “prone to wander”). And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body (we don’t have to give into the temptations of our flesh – mature, Christ-like people don’t. We can exercise self-control with the help of the Holy Spirit). 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! (so here James gives 3 examples of how small things can impact either positively or negatively much larger things). 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell (so clearly if we’re not careful our tongue can have a devastating impact on others). 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue (only God can tame the tongue). It (the tongue) is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (we ought not be sending out mixed messages). 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? (WE believers should be! See James 1:5). By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom (we show we have wisdom by our behavior, by our actions). 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice (bottom line – to whom we belong, God or Satan, is demonstrated by the way we behave). 17 But the wisdom from above (God’s wisdom) is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (A truly wise person will live their life controlled by the Holy Spirit and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit). 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Comments? Questions?

V1, With every privilege, there comes with it a responsibility. And so it is with teaching God’s word. Teaching is certainly a privilege, but the words that teachers sow can affect many lives. James warns those of us who teach that we will be held strictly accountable before God for what we say. Being judged with greater strictness has to do with God’s judgment on false teachers.

There are three things I keep in the forefront of my mind prior to standing up and teaching God's word:

 Motive – Why am I doing this? Is it for my own glory or am I doing it to honor Go?

 Target audience – To whom will I be speaking? You all are investing your own time to come here. That means that I have a responsibility to give you what you need to hear, the truth from God's word and application for your lives.

 Accountability – I must realize that I am personally being held accountable by a holy and righteous God for what I say. So I better make sure that what I say is God's truth and not merely personal opinion.

Oh and one last thing – those of us who teach are expected to model the truth we teach, to practice what we preach, so to speak.

V 2, Each one of us stumbles at one point or another during our Christian walk – that can come in any number of forms: bad habits, fraternizing with the wrong people, allowing ungodliness to creep into our lives, getting our life's priorities out of whack, getting upset at a situation or at a person, selfish attitudes, or words we speak. A teacher, preacher or Christian leader must be able to keep all areas of his or her life under control, both their words and their actions. This can only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit. In our own flesh we are prone to wander and will be more likely to stumble spiritually.

V 3-5, James gives 3 illustrations of how small things can impact much larger things. The first two are positive illustrations (a horse's bit and a ship's rudder). The third illustration is a negative example (a fire). Likewise, the tongue, which is a small part of our body, can impact our whole life in either a positive or negative way.

V 6, You need to understand something…the tongue is not the problem. As Chuck Swindoll says, “[the tongue] is merely the messenger that delivers the dictates of a desperately sick heart.” Jesus said, "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man” (Matt 15:18). So, as James talks about the tongue bear in mind that the root problem is not external but internal – it’s the human heart. Our tongue simply reveals who we really are.

James says the tongue stains the whole body. It poisons the whole body. How do you stop a poison once it enters the body? How do stop a fire once it has started to spread? It can be done, but only after it has caused much damage. The time to control our tongue is before we speak. Stop and ask yourself these questions: (1) Is it true? (2) Is it necessary? (3) Is it kind? The answers to these questions will determine whether we should say it.

V 7-8, Most of the animal kingdom can be tamed, but James says that nobody can tame the tongue. Several years ago we took our grandkids to SeaWorld. It’s amazing that they can train dolphins, whales, seals, sea lions, otters, cats and dogs! Yet it seems as though nobody can tame the human tongue! At best all we can do by our own effort is to learn to control the damage caused by the tongue. God, our Creator, is the only one who can tame our tongues.

V 9-10, With our tongues we can bless God thru our words of worship and adoration. But we can also curse people by our words of slander, gossip, criticism, bragging, manipulating, complaining and lying. This contradiction reflects our basic human nature. We are good in one sense, in that we were made in God's image; but we are also evil, we’ve fallen short of what God intended for us to be.

V 11-12, If out of our life we are sending mixed messages, which message is it that people are going to believe? Let’s face it, you and I are going to slip from time to time because we’re human. However, that said, there should be some consistency in the way we behave and in our regular conversation.

V 13, A wise person possesses wisdom. What’s wisdom? It’s the ability to apply truth to everyday life. It’s the very thing that Solomon asked God for in 2 Chronicles Chap 1. Recall the words from James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” So God is the source of wisdom.

If somebody acts foolishly, are they wise? No. If someone acts wisely are they wise? Yes. James has already established that we show we have faith by our works, by our actions. The Bible says that we demonstrate our love by the way we treat others, again by our actions. We prove that we trust God when we are obedient, by our actions. In this verse James says that we show we have wisdom by our behavior, by our actions. As James puts it: “By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” Faith, hope, love, trust, and wisdom are not just great ideas to be pondered and considered. No, they are realities that must be lived out.

V 14-16, Strife and envy do not originate with God. These are character traits of one who does not possess true wisdom. This sort of wisdom originates with Satan. Anything that causes division and strife in the body of Christ is not of the Lord.

Remember our study of Galatians Chap 5? There Paul lists some of the works of the flesh – things like immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, envying, drunkenness, etc. Then later by contrast he mentions the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. So, to whom we belong (God or Satan) will be demonstrated outwardly by the way we behave.

V 17, A truly wise person lives their life controlled by the Holy Spirit and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit.

V 18, What we sow we shall reap. Peacemakers plant seeds of peace and the fruit it yields is righteousness. Isaiah 32:17 says, “And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.” When a farmer plants his crops he needs several things to produce a good harvest: good seeds (analogy God’s word), good soils (analogy our heart), good conditions (analogy, an environment of fellowship among God's people)

Reading James causes us to stop and take spiritual inventory of our life. Is God pleased with my life? Are there areas I need to yield control over to Him? Am I exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in my life?

Take My Life, Lead Me Lord…