

James Chapter 3A

One of the greatest joys in life is watching your children grow up before your eyes:

- One of the most exciting times for parents is when their child first learns to talk.
- Listening for: Da Da or Momma but Shocked when their first word was NO!

Last year we were puzzled and a little concerned when Hope was not speaking. What is wrong? She was 2 years old and really not speaking.

As parents we expect that there should be a normal process of maturation taking place in our children and it is worrisome when that's not happening.

- Hope had frequent ear infections. She underwent surgery to remove of her adenoids and insert ear tubes.
- Almost immediately, her speech displayed the evidence of new life in her ears.

Well this Epistle of James is all about the normal maturing process that God works by His Spirit in the lives of his redeemed children. Our New Life in Christ:

- Begins with a new birth
- Then as Newborn babies we desire the sincere milk of God's Word.
- Our constant feeding on the Word enables the children of God to grow in grace.
- One of the first signs that God had given me a new heart was the change that took place in my tongue. The "Locker Room Talk" (*Trump calls it*) was gone.

James tells us: 1:26 **If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.**

- Like many of the other Books of Wisdom in the Bible James focuses attention on the tongue of the redeemed.
- David describes the speech of God's people this way:

Psalm 15: 1 **O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?**
2 **He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;** 3 **who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;**

- Once again the evidence of God's redeeming grace is found in the tongue.

Psalm 37: 30 **The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.**
31 **The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.**

- Throughout this little Epistle of James we find various tests designed to confirm God's gracious work of redemption in the life of those who believe.
- Returning to the book of James: Ch.3 focuses on the tongue.

I have broken down James teaching on the tongue into these three headings:

1. The Potential to Condemn (Not many should be teachers because they will be judged more severely)

2. The Power to Control (even though the tongue is a small member of the body it holds great power)
3. The Puzzling Contradiction (The words of our mouth reveal a troubling duplicity in our heart)

1 Potential to Condemn

James opens chapter 3 describing the potential for condemnation that is found in the tongue.

James 3:1 **Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.**

- The word that James uses for “Teachers” was most often used of Rabbis and those who functioned in an official teaching or preaching role in the Synagogue and this same word came to be used of those who teach in the church.

You may remember from the Gospel of John that Nicodemus was called “**The Teacher of Israel,**” (*Nick was one of the most prominent teachers in the land*) and in Jesus’ question, he holds Nick accountable to know the scriptures concerning the New Covenant.

We know from our study of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11 that God has gifted certain individuals in the church with the ability to teach His Word.

- According to Ephesians 4, God uses these gifted individuals to help believers grow in maturity and understanding, so that they will no longer be tossed to and fro by every wind and wave of doctrine.

Here in Ch. 3, James warns his readers that those who teach will be judged more strictly, and I must say that this verse is always in the forefront of my mind.

- It restrains the level of humor that I will use when I stand behind the pulpit.
- It motivates me to diligence in study that I may show myself approved a workman who need not be ashamed rightly dividing the Word of Truth.
- And it pushes me beyond my fleshly desire for the approval of men and drives me to seek the approval of God alone.

The writer of Hebrews speaks to church leaders instructing them to “**keep watch over** (their) **souls, as those who will have to give an account.**” (Heb. 13:17)

If you are in leadership training, you need to consider carefully the words of James that describe the heightened level of accountability that you will face when you stand before God.

- The Lord Jesus said:

Luke 12:48B, **Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required,**

- We shouldn’t let the warning keep us from teaching the Word of God. There is great reward to those who faithfully fulfill the sacred task.

When the Apostle Paul met for the final time with the elders from Ephesus, he spoke with confidence about the things that he had taught.

Acts 20: 25 **And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.**

- You may be wondering what all of this has to do with you. You are not an Elder, you're not in leadership training and you have no desire to be a Pastor.

Well my friends: EVERY Believer, every small group leader, every Sunday School teacher, every mature believer who disciples a younger believer, every mother and Father who takes responsibility to train up their children in the way in which they should go will stand before God and give an account of the things they have taught.

It is God's will that all of his people would grow in their understanding and their ability to communicate the glorious truth of The Gospel.

Take a minute to ponder the words that the Lord Jesus spoke right before he ascended into heaven: **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Matthew 28:19

- So regardless of who you are, if you are a believer, if you are a true disciple of the Lord Jesus you are called to make disciples of all nations and that requires some form of teaching.

NOW I would like to speak to those of you who teach our children, those of you who guide our youth, those of you who take it upon yourselves to teach Bible studies in your homes:

Considering this strong warning that James provides and understand that teachers will be judged with a greater severity. With that in mind:

- If an Elder in the church raised a question about something that you were teaching in Sunday School, if I as your Pastor approached you when you were leading a small group with concerns about the content of your teaching.
- Should you be offended and respond in anger or would you see that warning as an act of love, given from a heart of humility, from one teacher to another, motivated by a desire to keep you from experiencing the judgment of God.

Friends it is important that we walk humbly and remain teachable at all times.

- Let me give you a good example:

Acts 18:24 Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. (O.T. Scriptures) 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

- He believed and he taught the Scriptures foretelling the coming of Messiah, He submitted to the baptism of repentance that was taught by John to prepare for the coming of Messiah.
- BUT he did not know that Jesus Christ had come and died for the sins of his people. Priscilla and Aquila took him aside:

26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

- And the results of their intervention: Apollos received instruction and preached the Gospel with great power and accuracy.

27 And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

- Knowing that we will be judged for the things that we teach let's take the next step and really consider the power of the tongue.

2 Power to control

James 3: 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

- This process of sanctification that we are engaged in requires diligent discipline. Like the old children's song, "*Be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little ears what you hear, for the Father up above is looking down in love*"
- Of all of the disciplines that we engage in (the eyes, the ears) the most difficult is the discipline of the tongue.

James points us toward true Christian maturity when he says, "a perfect man, a mature believer is one who is able to control his tongue."

- When a believer displays the fruit of self-control in his speech, when he or she restrains their tongue from Gossip, slander, malice, envy, hatred,
- When a Christian weighs his or her words carefully and holds his tongue, when he listens more than he speaks; where there is no foolish jesting, no fits of rage, that believer is a perfect man, a perfect woman.
- NOW before you dismiss James' exhortation saying, "Nobody's Perfect." Let me tell you the word that is translated "Perfect" (Teleios) is used throughout the New Testament to describe Christian maturity. Paul uses it of himself.

Philippians 3:12 **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.**

- Paul recognized that he had not yet attained full maturity but he continued to strive after it simply because he belonged to Christ.

In this context of Christian Maturity James provides us with 3 illustrations, clearly showing that although the tongue is a very, very small part of our body it has an enormous impact on our spiritual condition.

- It can steer us into either blessing or curse.

James 3:3 **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.**

- Just a small piece of metal placed next to the tongue of a great Clydesdale and you are able to control, able to turn, able to direct that massive creature wherever you want him to go.
- So also the rudder of a great ship is but a small component that has the ability to direct the vessel wherever the Captain desires it should go.
- The rudder of a ship is neither good nor evil it merely responds to the movement of the pilot.
 - A Somali pirate steers his boat with an evil intent to kidnap and plunder.
 - A US Coastguard Captain steers his ship to rescue some poor soul who has fallen into the sea.
- Like the rudder of the ship the tongue has no moral virtue of itself it merely does the bidding of the one who is at the helm.
 - When the tongue is directed by a heart that is deceitfully wicked it can cause unprecedented destruction.

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! 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.**

- The imagery employed by James here calls attention to the great destructive power of hateful, lying, heretical or simply careless words.
- No doubt you have been the victim of such speech at some point in your life. Someone who has been pleasant in your presence turned around and trashed your reputation behind your back.

Solomon writes: Proverb 11:9 **With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.**

- Have you ever wondered why it is that the communication of positive affirming words seems to stop at one person BUT slanderous words spread like a wild fire until they have devoured a person's reputation in the minds of many?

Joel Beeke tells the story of an older Pastor who faithfully ministered the Word of God for many years in a local church. One Sunday after the morning service, a man patiently waited until everyone had left the building so that he could speak with the Pastor privately.

- Sheepishly he confessed that he had been spreading gossip about the pastor for a number of months. In an attitude of true brokenness the man said, "I beg of you please forgive me, I realize that my words have had a significant impact on your reputation."
- To which the Pastor replied, "I will most certainly forgive you, but I would like you to do something for me." And the man answered, "Anything. I understand the harm that my words have done."
- The Pastor said, "In order for you to truly understand the far reaching effects that your words have had on my life, I would like you to take a pillow and climb to the roof of the highest building in our fair city, unzip the case and shake that pillow until every last feather has departed from the case. Then I want you to go down into the streets and gather up every last one of the feathers so that none is missing."
- You see, once destructive words have departed out of our mouths, it is all but impossible to take them back.

Friends, here is a practice that I would ask every one of you to adopt. If someone comes to you with a dainty morsel of gossip, a complaint or issue that they are having with someone else in the church. Ask that person if they have shared their concern with the person or persons involved.

- If they say NO, take them by the hand and go directly to that person.
- If they say YES, take them by the hand and go directly to that person and serve as a peacemaker in the process of bringing restoration between brothers.

The tests that James issues throughout his Epistle uncover the duplicity that remains in the hearts of believers. The Holy Spirit through James reveals the sad, even tragic contradictions between what we believe and how we live.

- One of the true signs of Christian maturity is the narrowing of the gap between our talk and our walk.
- Christian growth becomes evident when the faith that we confess with our mouth is demonstrated by the way in which we live our lives.

Here in Ch 3, James draws his critique of the tongue to a conclusion by showing the duplicitous nature of our speech. What do I mean by that?

- If you are old enough to remember the old John Wayne movies, you might recall the famous words spoken by the Native American Chief who said, “White man specks with forked tongue.”

James draws attention to the forked tongue of the immature believer, one who uses his mouth to bless God in the sanctuary and on the way home uses his mouth to speak curses upon his fellow man when he pulls out in front of him.

- This is what I call Our Puzzling Contradiction

3 Puzzling Contradiction

9 *With it (with the tongue) 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.*

- It seems that our tongues are hopelessly and helplessly inconsistent, which is absurd when you realize that both blessing and cursing spring from the same source, and that is the heart.
- When James addresses the puzzling contradictions in our speech he is remembering the words of the Lord Jesus.

Matthew 12: 35 *The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*

- True and Saving Faith will be Vindicated, Displayed by the words that come forth from our lips.

James moves on to highlight the absurdity of duplicitous speech by comparing it to a spring that pours forth both fresh and salt water.

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.*

- Springs are very consistent. They pour out the same clear water, often at the same temperature all year long regardless of what is happening on the surface.
- In the same way, Olive trees most naturally produce olives because they are olive at the very core. It is their nature to produce only olives.

With that in mind, it seems strange that we who have received a new heart and a new Spirit from God, We who have been made partakers of the divine nature through Christ would bring forth both blessing and cursing from our lips.

I suppose that if a controlled tongue is evidence of spiritual maturity then duplicity of speech would be evidence of immaturity.

- How many of us today would freely confess that we need to grow in maturity when it comes to how we speak?
- Let's bring this to a close by remembering the words of the Apostle Paul as He evaluated his areas of immaturity.

Philippians 3:12 **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.**

- Even though we have been adopted by the Father.
- Sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.
- Seated in heavenly places in Christ.
- For those who believe, the work of redemption is finished FOR us but it is not finished IN US.
- We must press on.

13 **Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,**

14 **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

- Forgetting what lies behind: Our fleshly glory, pride and self-sufficiency.
- Receiving the forgiveness of sin, by the grace of God, through faith in Christ.
- WE strain forward (Pic of a runner approaching the finish line) This is the image of our sanctification, God has opened our eyes to see the goal, he has revealed his glory in the person of Christ and given His spirit whereby we "Strain toward the goal to win the prize."