

Practical Day-To-Day Christianity

[As shown in the letter written by James]

Part 3

James 3:1 [NIV] *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”*

Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in Jewish culture and many who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers.

James warned that although it is good to aspire to teach, the teachers' responsibility is great because their words and example affect others' spiritual lives.

Acts 13:1 [NIV] *“In the church at Antioch there were **prophets and teachers**: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.”*

Teachers are ranked with prophets who sent the apostles Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

Apostles and prophets were forever on the move, their field of work was the whole church, they did **not** stay long in any one congregation.

Teacher worked within a congregation for it was to them that the converts to Christianity were handed over for instruction in the facts of the Christian gospel and for edification in the Christian faith and way of life.

Some of the teachers in the early church failed in their responsibility, we get glimpses of this in scripture.

Acts 15:24 [NIV] *“We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and **disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.**”*

1 Timothy 1:3-11 [NIV] *“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may **command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work, which is by faith.** The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. **They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.** We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”*

There were teachers who tried to turn Christianity into another kind of Judaism. Who wanted to introduce circumcision and the keeping of the Old Covenant laws.

2 Timothy 4:1-4 [NIV] *“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction. For **the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit***

their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

Some set themselves up as teachers who would ponder to the false desires of the crowd, sometimes for financial gain.

Apart from false teachers James shows that teaching is a dangerous occupation for any person, because his instrument is speech and his agent the tongue.

In the Christian church the teacher took the place of the rabbi in the Jewish religion.

It was true that in the Jewish culture the rabbi was **not** allowed to take money for teaching. A rabbi was supposed to support his bodily needs by working at a trade.

But it was also held to be a specially pious and meritorious work to take a rabbi into your household and support him in every way.

Matthew 23:1-7 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: **“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. “Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the market-places and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’.”**”*

It was very easy for a rabbi to become the type of person that Jesus depicted, a spiritual tyrant, an ostentatious ornament of piety, a lover of the highest place at any function. A person who glorified in almost subservient respect which others showed to him in public.

No profession is more liable to become spiritually and intellectually proud.

There are two dangers every teacher must avoid:

- 1 A teacher must always take every care that they are teaching the truth and **not** their own opinions.
- 2 A teacher must ensure that they do **not** contradict their teaching by the way they live.

James demands that we never forget the great responsibility that the profession of a teacher brings with it.

James 3:2 [NIV] *“We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”*

James reminds us all, and teachers in particular, of two things:

- 1 There is no human being in this world who does not sin in some way.

Romans 3:10, 23 [NIV] *“As it is written: “There is no-one righteous, not even one;” ... “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

1 John 1:8 [NIV] *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

Ecclesiastes 7:20 [NIV] *“There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”*

- 2 There is no sin into which it is easier to fall, and no sin that has graver consequences than the sin of the tongue.

Matthew 12:36-37 [NIV] *“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

Proverbs 15:1-4 [NIV] *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. **The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.**”*

What we say and what we don't say are both important.

Proper speech is not only saying the right words at the right time in the right way, but also resisting our desire to say what we should not.

No words we utter should lack love for the person who is receiving them.

Examples of uncontrolled speech is gossiping, putting others down, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering and lying.

Before we open our mouth ask ourselves the question: *“Is what I am about to say true, necessary and kind?”*

No person can say that they have not been warned by scripture of the dangers of the tongue, and no person can say that they are entirely free of the sins of the tongue.

James 3:3-6 [NIV] *“When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, 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.**”*

Some may say why so much fuss about what is but a very small part of our body!

To combat this James gives us two pictures.

Just as we can control the whole body of a horse if we control the mouth.

Just as a small rudder on a ship controls the direction of the whole vessel, so our tongue controls the path we travel in life.

James is **not** saying that silence is better than speech, but is pleading for control in the use of our tongue.

There are two reasons why the damage which our words are like a fire:

1 The effect of our words is wide-ranging

The danger of words is that they can cause damage at a distance.

Modern day Internet is a powerful example of the widespread damage that words lacking love can produce.

2 Once spoken words are uncontrollable

Words spoken are **not** physical but spirit-like that cannot be destroyed.

Once a word is spoken there is no way we can get it back.

There is nothing which is so impossible to kill as a rumour.

Once a word is spoken it has gone out of our control.

The Greek word translated “world” is “kosmos”.

“Kosmos” can mean “adornment”. So this scripture could mean that the tongue is the adornment of evil. The tongue makes evil fatally and fascinatingly attractive.

This is very true.

By the use of the tongue we can excuse, defend, gloss over and seek to justify our own wicked ways.

It is by the use of the tongue people can persuade, seduce and lure others into sinful living.

“Kosmos” can also mean the world, this society in which we live.

In almost every part of the New Testament the word “cosmos” means the world with more than a suggestion of the evil world.

John 14:17 [NIV] “... *the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*”

The world being evil cannot receive the Holy Spirit.

John 14:22 [NIV] “*Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”*”

Jesus manifests Himself to His disciples but **not** to the world because of its evil nature.

John 15:18 [NIV] “*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*”

The evil world hates Jesus and His disciples.

John 18:36 [NIV] “*Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*”

Jesus’ Kingdom is **not** of this world.

1 Corinthians 1:20 [NIV] “*Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”*”

Paul condemns the wisdom of this world.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

A Christian must **not** conform to this world’s way of living or culture.

“Cosmos” in this sense is the world that is without the influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

Any uncontrolled tongue is likened to the world that is hostile to and ignorant of God.

“*Whole course of life*” – the literal meaning of the Greek is “*the wheel of being.*”

Life is like a moving wheel, any particular point of a wheel is moving up or down.

The whole of our course in life is a repetition of “ups and downs.”

Our use of our tongue can influence all our “ups and downs” of life, the whole of our life and living.

Matthew 12:30-37 [NIV] *“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. **But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”***

This is how important it is that we control every word that comes out of our lips, for it is an expression of our mind and heart.

James 3:7-8 [NIV] *“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.”*

We cannot clean up our heart by cleaning up our words.

It is only the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that can change our heart and mind, that will then clean up the words that come out of our mouth.

The idea of taming animals for the service of humanity is a theme that often occurs in the Old Testament.

Genesis 1:28 [NIV] *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

Genesis 9:2 [NIV] *“The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands.”*

Psalms 8:6-8 [NIV] *“You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”*

James tells us that our tongue should be tamed so it is used for the benefit of other human beings.

But this is something that we **cannot** do by our own unaided efforts.

James 3:9-12 [NIV] *“**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. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”*

We know all too well that there is a cleavage in human nature.

Our tongue is where we see this dual attitude of mind.

With the same tongue we sing praises to God and then turn round and curse other people made in the same image of God as we are.

Matthew 26:33, 69-75 [NIV] **“Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”** ... “Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.” **Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”** Immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

Peter told Jesus He would never deny Him. Yet hours later denied Jesus with oaths and curses.

Luke 9:51-54 [NIV] **“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”**

This was hardly an act of loving other people.

1 John 3:23 [NIV] **“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”**

“Love one another.”

1 John 4:12 [NIV] **“No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”**

“Love one another.”

Here we see the dramatic change that can take place when we allow the Holy Spirit to take charge of our mind and tongue.

It has not been unknown for a woman to speak with sweet graciousness at a religious meeting, and then to go outside to murder someone’s reputation with a malicious and gossiping tongue.

It is one of life’s hardest but plainest duties to see that our tongue does **not** contradict itself, but always speaks only words that we wish God to hear.

Matthew 5:9 [NIV] **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”**

Careful winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace and God loves peacemakers.

James 3:13-14 [NIV] **“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.”**

James here refers back to the beginning of the chapter by showing how a good teacher should use his tongue and life example.

James uses two interesting words.

“*Zēlos*” translated “*envy*” need not be a bad word at all. It often means the noble desire to imitate another when confronted with their greatness and goodness.

But there is a very narrow line dividing this noble act and jealousy.

“Erithia” translated “*selfish ambition*” – self-seeking, only doing it for the money they can earn. From the root word “*erithos*” meaning a hireling.

Acting like a selfish politician who is only seeking the job for honour and wealth.

Such a Christian teacher denies the truth he is seeking to impart to others.

James 3:15-16 [NIV] “*Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*”

James is saying that these teachers who are proud of their intellect and acting as if they are wise are **not** receiving their wisdom for God.

“*Earthly*” – Greek “*epigeios*” literally “*on earth.*”

“*Unspiritual*” – Greek “*psuchikos*” literally “*animal-like.*”

The natural human without the Holy Spirit.

Jude 19 [NIV] “*These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*”

Same Greek word used in James, translated “*of the devil.*”

James 3:17-18 [NIV] “*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*”

True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person’s character as listed in these verses.

“*Pure*” – Greek “*hagnos*” – meaning uncontaminated and clean enough to be able to approach God. Wisdom that is so cleansed of all ulterior motives, so cleansed of self, that it becomes pure enough to see God [**Matthew 5:8**].

“*Peace loving*” – Greek “*eirēnikos*” – forbearing – making allowances for others. Having a right relationship with God and other human beings. [**Matthew 5:9**] This is the end product of true wisdom.

“*Considerate*” – Greek “*epieikēs*” – a person who does **not** stand up for their rights. A person who knows how to temper justice with mercy. A person who remembers that there are greater things in life than rules and regulations. [**Matthew 5:5**]

“*Submissive*” – Greek “*eupeithēs*” – easy to be persuaded but **not** in the sense of pliable and weak but **not** being stubborn.

“*Full of mercy*” – Greek word “*eleos*” – mercy for a person even when the trouble they are in is their own fault.

The outcome of such mercy is always good fruits, that is practical help **not** just emotional pity. [**Matthew 5:7**]

“*Impartial*” – Greek “*adiakritos*” – literally not to be divided, without uncertainty, not wavering, hesitancy or vacillating.

A person who knows their own mind, chooses a course and abides by it. Because Christian wisdom is based on Christian certainties which come to us from God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. [**Matthew 5:6**]

“Sincere” – Greek “*anupōkritōs*” – unfeigned, without hypocrisy – [play acting]. Never acts a part to gain their own end.

Seeking Godly wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves with others and wanting to be like them.

Finally James says something that every Christian fellowship should have written on its heart.

“Peace” – Greek “*eirēnē*” means a right relationship between all human beings. A state in which there is uninterrupted friendship.

Only in such an atmosphere can the seeds of righteousness grow.

Bitterness and strife are barren and sterile soil in which the seeds of Godly righteousness will never grow, these will be nothing for God to reward with eternal life, in His Holy and righteous presence.