

June 24, 2007

James Chapter 3 Review

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are back today. Go ahead and grab your Bibles and let's go back to James chapter 3 one more time. If you are a guest today, you're here on a unique Sunday. We have been studying through the book of James verse by verse or chunk by chunk as the case may be and when we come to the end of each chapter, we go back through it and put those pieces back together, remind ourselves of what God has said, and look at what verses to hide in our hearts. Chapter 3 had two major themes – we spent 4 weeks looking at them. Let's go back and take a look. James chapter 3 beginning in verse 1.

TEXT 1-12

Obviously the truth here is that **your WORDS matter. All the time.** In fact as you look through the first 9 of those verses, we find out that our tongues have the power to condemn us before God, they have the power to control us in life, and they have the power to destroy our lives and those around us. And what James has given us so many illustrations of is that because of that power of the tongue, **when your TONGUE is brought under control, the rest of your LIFE will be as well.**

So when we said your words matter, it doesn't just mean in the impact the words themselves have – but your words matter as a focal point in your relationship with God – in your life as a Christian – that if you want to bring your life under the Lordship of Christ, focus on bringing your words there.

And we see the foundation for that truth in the next few verses 9-12. Our words are an instant expression of what's going on inside. Your tongue has the power to reveal the condition of your heart. **So the only way to have a tongue that consistently speaks rightly is to have a HEART that is consistently right with God.**

And that's what I want us to really get our brains wrapped around this morning. The battle for the purity of your mouth starts in your heart. The battle for controlling everything external starts internally with the condition of your heart. I want you to hold your finger here in James – we'll be back – but turn over to **Ephesians 4:29** with me.

“Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

The Holman Christian Bible says “let no rotten talk come out.” The Revised Standard says “Let no evil talk come out.” The King James says “let no corrupt communication come out.”

Unwholesome. Rotten. Evil. Corrupt. – what's the idea behind these words? The Greek word “sapos” is used in only one other context in the New Testament – in both Matthew & Luke where Jesus says that it is not a good tree that bears bad fruit. The term for bad fruit or bad tree is the same word that Paul uses. It has the idea of spoiled, decay, and rottenness all the way to the root.

Now we could spend a long time putting practical boundaries on what kind of talk that is – but the truth is every one of us who even might have a problem with this kind of talk is already thinking about what in how we speak falls into this warning. So let me just break it down into two broad kinds today in application.

First – **unwholesome talk means talk when the WORDS themselves are wrong.** For example – **taking the LORD'S NAME in vain.** John Piper said “It is a great contradiction of who we are as Christians if we say “My God!” or “God Almighty” or “Christ” or “Jesus” just because we are mad, surprised, or amazed. No one with a good marriage would stomp on his wedding ring to express anger. It stands for something precious and pure. And so does the name of God.

Another obvious example would be **words that even our CORRUPT society has deemed as FOUL**. “4 letter words” and the like. My dad always told me that when you revert to using curse words to express yourself you’re just revealing your ignorance. What James is saying is that it goes deeper than that. If even a godless society is offended by certain words when you are not, then it isn’t just your language that is foul, it is who you are. Ladies – you may like everything about a guy – how he looks, how he dresses, how he works, whatever – but if his talk falls into this category then don’t waste your time with him. Because what ought to be clean on the inside is unwholesome and it will out sooner or later.

A final example of when the words themselves are wrong is **when we TRIVIALIZE the terrible or the precious**. It is simply a contradiction to believe in the horrible reality of hell as revealed by Jesus and the Word of God and then to use the word like a punctuation mark for emphasis when talking about sports or politics. The same is true of damnation. And – if the command to “Be holy because I am holy” carries the same weight for us that it did for Moses and Jesus and the apostles, then we ought to find phrases like “Holy cow” or “holy anything” get stuck in our throats because it treats something infinitely precious as a trivial.

Second – **unwholesome talk means talk where the SPIRIT of the words is wrong**. What I mean by that is that **the words themselves are untarnished, but the USAGE is vicious and loveless**. You don’t need examples of this – again you know what that means.

Why do parents teach their kids that “shut up” is a no-no? The words themselves aren’t wrong. But the spirit behind their use is. **Even TRUTH can be unwholesome when the spirit behind it wrong** – that is the very nature of gossip and slander and revenge.

Don’t miss the point here. It isn’t about legalism. What James & Paul are both getting at is that what makes unwholesome talk or words is an unwholesome inside. Which is why what Paul does next here in Ephesians 4:29 isn’t to tell us what to say, he tells us why to say it. **Paul doesn’t tell us WHAT to say, he tells us WHY to say it**.

The NIV says to speak words that will “build others up according to their need that it may benefit those who listen.” But I like how the NAS among other versions carries the Greek into English – it says, **“that it may give GRACE to those who hear.”**

Listen – it isn’t “Christian” just to stop swearing. It isn’t “Christian” just to put good language in the mouth instead. It is “Christian” to ask the deeper heart question – am I speaking to edify, to build up? Is my mouth a means of grace? Am I building the faith of others by what I say?

A Christian is a person whose rotten root within has been made new by grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And like we looked in verses 10-12 of James 3, that grace inside bubbles up like a fresh fountain overflowing through our lives – and our mouths – into the lives of those around us. And that leads us into what James says next – so go back to the last half of **chapter 3 verses 13-18** where James reminds us that wisdom is more than knowledge – it is how you live your life.

TEXT 13-18

Just like our words reveal the condition of our hearts, what we saw in these verses in chapter 3 is that **your relationship to God is revealed in the kind of WISDOM that you live out**. Since wisdom is knowledge applied to how you live your entire life, what James shows us here are the motivation and the characteristics not only of earthly versus godly wisdom, but of the life that is lived based on it. And there is obviously a vast difference between the two. Again, we spent a couple weeks digging into all this so let me build on what we’ve said by looking at another passage that echoes the heart of James. Turn to **1 Corinthians 2:6-16** with me.

TEXT 6-16

Here Paul does the same thing that James does in contrasting the wisdom of man versus the wisdom of God. And there is so much incredible truth in this passage, there's no way we can look at it all today – I just want us to connect what Paul is saying with what James has shown us. So let's look at verse 9.

“However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.””

Now that is a verse that you may have heard as a kid – you may have heard it at funerals or hospitals – it's one that we take out of context really easily. We take it and say that Paul is referring to heaven – that our eyes haven't seen or ears heard or minds thought of wonderful heaven is going to be. And that's true – we don't know and it is going to be wonderful – but when you look at the context of what Paul is talking about here, it has nothing to do with heaven. He's talking about wisdom. About God's wisdom. About spiritual truth. **The context of what Paul is talking about in verse 9 is UNBELIEVERS – man by himself – not being able to know what salvation is like – what God's TRUTH is like.** God since ages past has prepared some fantastic things for the people that love Him. But the people that don't love Him can't know what those things are. The world with all of it's quest for truth can't figure it out.

How did James describe worldly wisdom – as earthly and unspiritual, right? That meant in a nutshell that it is tied to the mind of man and tied to the feelings or senses of man. That's what Paul is saying isn't going to work. The two ways that man comes to wisdom on his own is through objective empirical experiential method – what I see, what I hear, what I touch – or through subjective thought – my logic, my reason. And what Paul is saying is that that won't get there. No eye has seen – no ear has heard – no mind has conceived – the wisdom that God has for us. **Man's methods can't discover God's wisdom because God reveals it through HIS SPIRIT.**

James also talked about the motive of worldly wisdom, that it was driven by bitter envy and selfish ambition. Look what Paul says in verse 8:

“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

That simple statement is really huge. Something in Pilate and Herod and those who were in power when Jesus was crucified kept them from knowing the wisdom of God. Because had they known it, Paul says they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Where James says worldly wisdom is motivated by bitter envy and selfish ambition, Paul gives an example of men who were so enamored by the wisdom that leads to power and acclaim that they could not recognize the suffering Jesus as the Lord of glory. And as an aside – the same is true today – you can judge the wisdom of a man or even the truthfulness of a religion starting with what they do with the crucified Jesus.

But the point Paul is making is the one we saw last week – that **true wisdom comes FROM God THROUGH a relationship INTO our lives.** All the verses that follow in this passage in 1 Corinthians just point out that to the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of God is just foolishness. That those who are outside of Christ can not know the wisdom of God. But that we can. Like we looked at two weeks ago. We have Jesus in salvation. We have the Spirit as a deposit. And Paul says at the end here in verse 16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

So then – **how can we grow in true wisdom** – the wisdom that James says is and makes us – pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy & good fruit, impartial, & sincere? Let me give you 4 practical applications right quick.

1) **DESIRE it.** Proverbs 4:7-8 says

7 *Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*

8 *Esteem or prize her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you.*

The wisdom of God must be valuable to us or we'll never have it. It boils down to a question we find ourselves challenged by often in our study of God's Word – **do I really believe that God's way is best?** If I do, then I will desire it.

2) **STUDY it.** **Psalm 19:7** says “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.” The wisdom of God is found in the Word of God. Therefore we – you – have got to **devote yourself to studying and knowing the Word.** I would guess that 90% or maybe more of the problems I deal with in counseling situations would not be an issue if the person simply knew what God has said and followed it.

3) **ASK for it.** **James said in chapter 1 verse 5** as clearly as he could, when you lack wisdom, ask God for it. The wisdom that leads to the lifestyle James describes in verse 17, the wisdom that leads to the true and lasting happiness that God intends for us is not natural or inborn or, as Paul said, findable by ourselves. It is revealed by the Spirit of God. So ask the Spirit for it. Pray.

Lastly number 4 – **Think often of your DEATH.** Now you’re going what? That doesn’t fit. You asked how do we grow in wisdom – desire it, study it, ask for it – those three make sense – they even kind of rhyme – what’s this last deal – think often of my death?

Here’s why. **Psalm 90:12** says “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” There is scarcely any thought that will purge our priorities of the bitter envy and selfish ambition that James describes and Paul illustrates than the thought of our imminent death. As John Piper put it “**O how cleansing it is to ponder the kind of life we would like to look back on when we come to die.**”

Alright. As we wrap up chapter 3, I want to do one more thing and that is to put the chapter in the context of what James has been doing in the entire book. Remember James has been giving us a series of tests that can show us if our faith in Christ is authentic or not – if we really are saved or not – if Jesus is really in our hearts or not. And as painfully challenging as this study has been, I don’t know of anything more important for us to learn. So let me take chapter three and put it in that context. Turn with me to the book of **Acts. Chapter 4.**

One day Peter and John were going to the temple to pray and on the way they meet a crippled man and by the power of God they heal this man and make him whole. People see this guy who had been crippled jumping up and down and yelling and it draws a crowd around Peter & John so they begin to preach about Jesus. Well the rulers of the temple – the same people who crucified Jesus – see what is happening and they seize Peter & John and throw them in jail over night. The next morning, they bring them out in front of the entire court of all the leaders of the temple – the leaders of the Jews, the high priest – all the power people of the day – and they question them. Let’s pick up in **verse 8. (8-13).**

They listened to their words.

They looked at their wisdom.

And they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

That’s what James is saying in chapter 3.

When people listen to your WORDS.

When people look at your WISDOM.

Do people conclude that you have been with JESUS?

Let’s pray.