

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 3:9-12

Imagine if you will, driving to church one Sunday morning and an old white Chevy sputters out from a side street, cutting you off as you slam on the brakes—seemingly oblivious to your oncoming vehicle, and even more oblivious to how close you both came to a fatal accident. Even you can't believe what comes out of your mouth as the old white Chevy carries on down the road. You try to remember the last time you cursed like a sailor—and did you just take the Lord's name in vain? Just fifteen minutes later you are in church among the throng of God's redeemed people, hands raised high in praise—proclaiming Jesus with same tongue you just cursed out a total stranger with. You are vaguely aware of the dichotomy, but not aware enough of the hypocrisy. The Book of James—the Word of God—will not allow us to live a double minded, double-tongued life, no, not for a second. Is there forgiveness for our missteps on the path to personal holiness? Thankfully, yes! But even better, God wants us to understand what it means to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16) and why—in light of eternity—it matters.

James 3:9

(KJV) *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.*

(NIV) *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.*

You thought that in the privacy of your vehicle, no one could hear how you verbally murdered the person in the old white Chevy. Man or woman—doesn't matter. Made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)—matters a lot.

1John 4:20-21

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

James addresses rampant incongruity where he sees it among the Christian Jewish communities. For our better understanding of the term, here is the Webster's definition:

INCONGRUITY, n. [in and congruity.]

1. Want of congruity; impropriety; inconsistency; absurdity; unsuitableness of one thing to another. The levity of youth in a grave divine, is deemed an incongruity between manners and profession.
2. Disagreement of parts; want of symmetry.

James makes it clear that no matter how established religious tradition and religious behaviour may be in God's communities—there can be no admixture of carnality with godliness, or hatred with love:

1John 3:14-16

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

We have looked closely at James 3:1-12 and have been readily silenced by the author's fearless proclamation of truth. God's people must not at one moment worship God in spirit and truth and tongue, only to curse God's dearest creation in the next breath with the same tongue. In fact, we are to be quick to resolve any antagonistic feelings or sins against another brother or sister in Christ before attempting to worship God who gave His One and Only Jesus to forgive us:

Matthew 5:21-26

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Beloved, remember: reconciliation precedes reverence.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: What action steps do you need to take today to cleanse the channels through which God would use you in this world, and ultimately free you to worship Him fully?

James 3:10

(KJV) Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

(NIV) Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

Indeed, Brother James. This should not be. Not then, not today, not ever.

James 3:11

(KJV) Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

(NIV) Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

James 3:12

(KJV) Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

(NIV) My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Think of the source. A water supply is only as pure as its source. Its source will be tasted in the water itself. Bitter or sweet. Simple, right? A bitter source of sin, self, and Satan will produce a bitter product of froward, tainted speech. Living water from Jesus (John 4:10) will grow and nurture a tree of life—words that bless, heal, and save:

Proverbs 15:4

The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:1-2

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How is the source of what's in your heart affecting your walk and witness today? How about your speech?

*STUDY POINT: Find 3 verses or passages in the New Testament that you know God provided to hide in your heart—to produce in you a godly source.

James is not so much condemning the often, bitter patriotic battle cries of the Jewish Christians, as he is employing word pictures and established doctrine they would be sure to understand to align their faith and works. Within the context of this chapter—and indeed the whole book of James—we have to examine ourselves in our faith.

And we need not look any further than what proceeds from our tongues.

2Corinthians 13:5-6

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland