

Teachers, the Tongue, and True Wisdom.

In previous lessons, we learned:

1. That being “*brought forth by the word of truth,*” and thus becoming a “Christian,” is only the *first fruits* of Christianity, 1:18; and therefore,
2. That *second fruits* are both expected and required as the *second fruits* of receiving “*the implanted word,*” 1:19-27 (and have both prerequisites, vv.19-21, and requisites, vv.22-27);
3. And that thus *receiving the implanted word* has necessary effects to follow- such as the elimination of *evil motives* that lead to *partiality*, 2:1-11, the implementation of *mercy* in our *judgments* and the *application* of them, 2:12-13, and the necessity of *works* to our *faith*, 2:14-26 (this section was written to Jewish Christians of the early church, cf.1:1- not modern denominations!).

So, how does chapter 3 fit with this context and these established lessons? Let’s start by reading the text of 3:1-18.

Now let’s take a look at some specific verses and points of emphasis.

v.1, Teachers.

It sounds as if James is *discouraging* his readers from becoming *teachers* of God’s word. If so, it would be in stark opposition Heb.5:12ff where some were rebuked for not having *become teachers* in an otherwise appropriate amount of time! So what is the point being made in v.1?

Remember that James’ specific audience has already been shown that they: a) need to move on from *first fruits* to *second fruits* and become *doers of the word* rather merely *hearers who delude themselves*, 1:18-27; b) need to remove their *evil motive* judgments of one another and practice *impartiality* and *mercy*, 2:1-13; and, c) must have *obedient works* joined with and resultant from their *faith* in order to be *justified* before God.

Now, would you say that such “Christians” needed to become “*teachers*”? Wouldn’t one who had already demonstrated the inability to grow to *second fruit* maturity, failed to be *doers* rather than just *hearers*, who showed *partiality* from *evil motives* and a *lack of mercy* in their judgments and treatment of one another, and who apparently thus had a *useless* and *dead* faith, “*incur a stricter judgment*” for trying to *teach* what they had obviously neither *learned* nor *practiced*?

James is *discouraging this type* of weak, immature, and improperly motivated person from teaching! Notice that the verse says, “*Let not many of you become teachers....*” Who? Those to whom the letter is addressed and who manifest the failures outlined in the previous two chapters! However, such should not be taken as a general discouragement for those who have matured into *second fruits* by having the word fully *implanted* in his own heart, 2Tim.2:2. Yes, *teachers* of God’s word “*incur a stricter judgment*”- but especially so when they have yet *received the implanted word* themselves, their motivations toward and judgments of others are *evil* and *merciless*, and their own faith is *useless* and *dead*! Context matters!

vv.2-12, The Tongue.

The proclivity of the tongue toward *stumbling* links what has just been said regarding *teachers*, and what is about to be said regarding its *power*. The “*perfect*” (*teleios*- mature, complete, lacking in nothing, full-grown, fully developed, cp. 1:4; Matt.5:48; 19:21) man is able to *control his tongue*, and therefore *the whole body as well*, v.2. Moses serves as

relevant example. His inability to *control his* just once prevented his entrance into Canaan, cp. Num.12:3,6-8 → Ps.106:32-33. But the *perfect* man is able to control the tongue, and as a manifestation of that which is in his heart, cf. Matt.15:18, his *whole body as well*.

Vv.3-4 illustrate the **dominance** of the tongue relative to its *size*. The *mouth of the horse* and the *rudder of a ship* are small relative to the bodies to which they are attached. But these *small* members, once brought under control, *steer* the very large *bodies* of the *horse* and *ship*! So too it is with the tongue, v.5a.

Vv.5b-6 illustrate the **danger** of the tongue. A *small fire* has the potential- when *unguarded* and *uncontrolled*, to destroy a *great forest*.

Vv.7-8a illustrate the **difficulty** of *taming* the tongue. *Damazo* doesn't mean to *domesticate*, but rather means to *curb* or *restrain*. Thus, "What about the alligator or crocodile or etc. etc. etc.?" doesn't really matter. The point is that no one came *curb* or *restrain* the tongue to the point that it can be trusted "off the leash" or *unrestrained*!

Vv.8b-12 illustrate **deceptive deadliness** of the tongue. *First fruit* "Christians," by not properly *mastering* or *restraining* the tongue, *curse men* and *bless God*. The *deceptive* part of this is that such "see" themselves as *religious* while their tongues are a *fountain* of both *fresh* and *bitter*- which is impossible, cf.1:26 (see also 1John 3:7-8)!

vv.13-18, True Wisdom.

By contrast to the above, those who are *wise* (*sophos*- wise, skilled, expert, cultivated, and educated) and *understanding* (*epistemon*- experience or having knowledge by experience), and thus those who have matured to *second fruit* level, demonstrate *true wisdom* through *good behavior* and *deeds in gentleness*, v.13.

This *true wisdom* of *second fruits* is in contrast to feigned wisdom of *first fruits only* Christians who, by failing to *tame the tongue* (and in essence failing to *master self*), manifest *bitter jealousy*, *selfish ambition*, and *arrogance*. When so living, we *lie against the truth* in that we claim affiliation with God (*fresh water*), but our deeds/tongues demonstrate a partnership with Satan (*bitter water*), v.14.

The contrast between the two polar opposites of the *true wisdom* of *second fruits* and the *feigned* and *false wisdom* of *first fruits* is made clear by comparison in vv.15-18.

- *Earthly, natural* (as opposed to *supernatural*), and *demonic* wisdom produces *jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder* (of life/living), and *every evil thing*, vv.15-16.
- But *divine* wisdom from *above* (and thus *supernatural*) is *pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable* (*eupeithes*- easily obeying, compliant), *full of mercy* and *good fruits, unwavering* (*adiakritos*- without ambiguity or uncertainty), and without *hypocrisy*, v.17.
- The result is the **second fruit of righteousness and peace**, v.18!

Concluding Questions:

1. Should you be a *teacher*, or are you still stuck in *first fruits of evil/selfish motives, partiality, lack of mercy, and faith without obedient works*?
2. Have you learned to *tame your tongue*, or you still trying to put out both *fresh* and *bitter water*?
3. Have you matured to the *second fruits of true and supernatural wisdom*, or are you instead still manifesting the *first fruits of earthly and natural wisdom*?