



METRO NEW YORK WORLD MINISTRY
ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL CONTRIBUTING NOTES
For the week of November 8 – 14, 2014
Lesson #7: **The Book of James, Lesson 7**

James 3:1-12: Control the Tongue

The subject of speech is not a new thought when we come to the third chapter of James. In chapter one, we read:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:” James 1:19

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.” James 1:26

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” James 2:12

Now James continues to instruct us that a pure religion will exemplify a life without hasty and unsanctified speech.

Verse 1: “be not many masters”

The word for “masters” is the same word for “teachers.” So the verse is saying, “be not many teachers.”

It is the Holy Spirit that distributes the gifts according to His will. See 1 Corinthians 12:11. The gift of teaching is one of these gifts of the Spirit. See Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28. Those who teach are accountable for what they teach and the influence they have upon others. The greater the gift and responsibility, the greater the accountability. Therefore, a teacher who is heard by many must be all the more careful about what he says.

Verse 2: “the same is a perfect man”

All of us have made mistakes and have said things we wish we had never said. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, a man need not offend in word. Such a man demonstrates that the heart is pure when his words are pure. However, if we are careless in speech it demonstrates that there are thoughts that are not in agreement with Jesus.

Verse 3: “we put bits in the horses’ mouths”

In the same way that a wild horse endangers the rider, so an unbridled tongue endangers the soul of the man who possesses it.

To ride a wild horse we must tame it and control its movements with a small bit. With this small bit in the horse's mouth, this large and spirited animal is under control.

The wild and unconverted heart of man must be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Even after he is converted, he must guard his speech that he might not defile himself and run wild again. Words have so much influence upon us and others. With the same small mouth we may praise God or curse Him. We may speak words



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of encouragement or discouragement. We may talk faith or doubt. It is a small part of our physical being, but it controls so much of the path that we travel.

Verse 4: “whithersoever the governor listeth”

Ships are much bigger than horses, but are still controlled and guided by that which is small. For the horse it is the bit, and for the ship it is the small rudder. But a ship cannot think like a horse. It is the “governor” that steers the rudder that directs the ship. Even in fierce winds, the ship may safely make it to the harbor.

In the case of the ship, a decision has to be made. Will the “governor” steer the ship to the left or the right? In the same way, we will choose to speak words that destroy or give life? In either case, a choice must be made. So when it comes to speech we do have a choice. The choice to speak pure words is ours, but the power to speak pure words belongs to God.

Verse 5: “boasts great things”

Words may be spoken that will lead a precious soul to Christ. Prayers may be offered that will lead to a great revival. Are there any limits to the wonderful things that can be said and should be said? Is it possible to see a great revival amongst us? Can such a revival begin with a few pure words in your family and local church?

Verse 6: “setteth on fire the course of nature”

Yet, with this same tongue we may set in motion a thousand evils. The spark that burns and destroys a forest of only a few acres, can as easily burn and destroy a forest made up of millions of acres. It is best never to set in motion any evil by our words. Rather, we are to set in motion a thousand kindnesses by our selfless service to others.

But many “great things” have not happened because of evil speech. Some churches have split over careless words. Millions no longer attend our churches because of ill-chosen words.

Verse 7: “hath been tamed by man”

Mankind was given charge over the things of this world. We were to care for and tame the animals both large and small. Consider how wonderfully man has tamed every kind of beast, the birds, serpents, and sea creatures. Perhaps you have witnessed the taming of lions, elephants, killer whales, and birds of prey.

Verse 8: “But the tongue no man can tame”

What is harder to tame a lion or the tongue? We would likely say, “I do not think I could tame a lion.” However, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, it is must harder to tame the tongue than the lion. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, the tongue becomes an “unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

Think about it! What started the Civil War, WW I, WW II, and all the other wars that have destroyed millions of lives? It is the tongue which represents the evil in man’s heart. What is the solution? It is the gospel.



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Verse 9: “bless God....and therewith curse we men”

What a tragic testimony of what happens all too often in the house of God. We outwardly express our faith and gratitude to God, and then with the same mouth we curse our fellow man, if not, even our fellow believer.

Same mouth, but double-minded!

Verse 10: “these things ought not to be so”

With the same mouth come blessings and curses. But it does not need to be so. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the heart is changed. With the new heart the thoughts are changed. With new thoughts come new words.

Verse 11: “sweet....and bitter?”

When you draw water from a well, it will not come out both sweet and bitter. It is either clear or it is dirty, but it cannot be both. Therefore we must concern ourselves with the source of our words. Do we speak from an unconverted heart? Or, are we born-again? Are we renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit? Have we accepted Jesus as both our sacrifice for sin and our example for all holy living?

If the heart is pure the words will be pure.

Verse 12: “no fountain can yield salt water and fresh”

We are still in this old world because we have been satisfied with simply asking for the forgiveness of sins without asking to be cleansed from sin. We have been satisfied with asking God to forgive us for producing olives when we were to produce figs. We have asked God to forgive us for our salty water ways, but have not asked God to rid of the source of that salty water.

The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

Did you catch that? If we confess our sins, then God will both “forgive us of our sins” and “cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” What a wonderful promise! It is God’s part to forgive and cleanse. It is our part to confess our sins.

But what does it mean to confess our sins?

First, there needs to be an acknowledgement of sin. If we do not acknowledge that we have done wrong, then there will be no true confession of sin. Second, with a humble heart we are to confess our sins to God. Never are we to confess our sins in a flippant or irreverent way. We are asking pardon from the Creator of heaven and earth. Third, we are to confess our sins with heartfelt repentance, regretting that we had committed them. If we are not truly repentant, have we truly confessed them? The psalmist wrote, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Psalm 34:18. And lastly, confession should be specific, acknowledging the very sins we have committed.



Does God want to forgive me of my sins?

The Bible says that God “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance....For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16.

Does God really want me to be cleansed?

The Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish....This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

Jesus “gave Himself” for us that we might be cleansed “by the word.” He wants to present us to His Father as a “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” The “will of God” is our “sanctification.” The word “sanctification” means to make holy. Clearly, God wants to do more than forgive us of our past sins, He also wants to cleanse us from those sins.

But what if I confess my sins and I keep on committing the same sins?

This is the experience of many. Does this mean that there is something wrong with God and His promise? Absolutely not! The problem must lie with my confession. Would you agree?

Is it possible for a person to want to be forgiven but not changed? Certainly! A person may want to be forgiven for their angry words hurled at another person, but they still choose to hold ugly feelings towards that individual. A person may want to be forgiven for adultery or fornication, but he still wants to hang on to immoral thoughts and practices.

It would seem evident that there is a true confession of sin that leads to both forgiveness and cleansing, and there is a confession of sin that leaves us unchanged. Obviously this is a very serious topic. We do not want to lose out on heaven because we have a mistaken concept of confession of sin.

What does it mean to be cleansed?

Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3. Is being “born again” more than being forgiven for past sins?

What does it mean to be “born again”?

The Bible says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new....But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:8-10.

The new birth experience is the beginning of a new life in Christ. In this new life we “put away” the old life of anger, jealousy, and crude jesting. After all, we are more than “forgiven,” we are to be “cleansed.”



If I have confessed my sins, why do I still struggle and fall into sin?

In answering this question, I would like us to look at a few verses in the book of Romans chapter seven, which reads, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do....O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Romans 7:18, 19, 24.

What a terrible struggle! Here Paul is describing the experience of someone who has confessed his sins, but who has not experienced the cleansing power that God has promised. This unconverted man knows what is right, he even wants to do what is right, but he does not know how. In the following verses, we find that he acknowledges that God’s law is holy, but that he is carnal, sold under sin. “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good....For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Romans 7:12, 14.

It is true that God’s ten moral precepts are holy, just, and good. The problem is not with God’s Ten Commandments, the problem is with us. We were born with a carnal or fallen nature with the inclination to sin. It is like we were born into the bondage to sin, or “sold under sin.” But there is hope. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9. If God can cleanse us of all unrighteousness, then the cleansing power of God must be more powerful than the sinful nature we were born with.

So what is the problem?

For most professed Christians, they have only confessed the sins they have committed. But let us ask ourselves another question, “Why did we commit those sins?” We committed them because *we are* sinful. The problem is with our sinful nature.

Jesus said, “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” Matthew 7:17-19.

In these words of Jesus, we see that the problem is not the bad fruit, but the bad tree. We can continue to ask God to forgive us of our bad fruit, but what do we really need to do? We need to ask God to forgive us and cleanse us from the evil inside of us.

I can ask God to forgive me for my angry words toward someone, but at some point I need to ask God to forgive me for the evil and hateful spirit that is in me. Not only do I need to ask God to forgive me for my angry spirit, I need to ask Him to cleanse me of that evil spirit. Only when I am cleansed of that evil spirit can I keep from producing the bad fruit.

More than this, not only do I need to be cleansed of that evil spirit, but I need the spirit of Christ in my life that I might speak words that are kind, courteous, and uplifting.

Here is how true confession works:

1. I confess that I have spoken words that were unkind, and I ask God to forgive me.
2. I then ask God to cleanse me of the evil inside of me that caused me to speak evil words.
3. I then ask God to share with me the kind, courteous, and uplifting words of Jesus.



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I remember the time when someone broke into my home and stole three hundred dollars. My neighbor had seen this individual come into my home for a short time and then left. When I got home, my neighbor shared with me what had happened. I knew the man that came into my home uninvited. I also knew that he was capable of stealing my money, so I went to see if my three hundred dollars was still there. Guess what? It was gone!

I knew that this man had stolen my money. But I also noticed that I had some ugly feelings towards this man. I knew that my feelings were wrong, so I prayed that God would forgive me for my ill-feelings. But then, God impressed me that I needed more than forgiveness for my ill-feelings, I needed cleansing.

There was something inside of me that caused the ill-feelings. So I prayed, “Father, please forgive me for my ill-feelings towards this man. I do not love him. I wasn’t even born with this kind of love. But I know that You love him, and I want to be born-again with Your love in my heart for this man. Thank you Father, for forgiving me and cleansing me of the evil within me and for sharing with me your altogether beautiful character. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

When I felt I had been forgiven and cleansed, then I went to this man’s home with the love of Jesus in my heart. I knocked at his door and he opened the door. The first thing I said was, “I know that you took my three hundred dollars. But I want you to know that I forgive you. And I want you to know that you are worth a lot more than three hundred dollars.”

The Holy Spirit had not only worked on my heart, but on his heart as well. We began to study the Bible together, and he accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior.

Now if I had only asked to be forgiven for my ill-feelings, would I have gone to his home with the love of Jesus? No. The evil inside of me that caused the ill-feelings was still in me. What I needed was to be cleansed of that sinful nature that caused the sinful feelings. More than this, I needed to ask God to give me the love of Jesus for this man.

This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not only forgiven but changed. This change begins when we give our sins to Christ. As Peter proclaimed, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts 2:38.

When we give our sins to Christ it is His glory to take them. In return He gives us the Holy Spirit to live the new life. As we daily walk in the power of the Holy Spirit we are being cleansed from all unrighteousness. This is what true confession is all about.

This earnest desire to be both forgiven and cleansed is what led the psalmist to write, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23, 24. This must be our prayer, that God would search our hearts and reveal any wickedness that remains in us.



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In His mercy, God will allow certain tests and trials to come our way that we might see things about ourselves that we have not seen. This must take place because we cannot confess sins that we are still ignorant of. So we pray, “O God, show me where I still fall short of Thy glory. Reveal to me where I am still unlike your altogether beautiful Son.” The Holy Spirit will not show us all our faults at once, but will with each conviction of sin impress us that we can be both forgiven and cleansed.

We should have no fear of allowing the Holy Spirit to convince of sin in our life. No matter what we have done, and no matter how many times we have done it, God will forgive us and cleanse us. What we should fear is our lack of desire to be cleansed of sin.

If the Holy Spirit reveals some new sin in my life, then does that mean that I have never been converted?

If the Holy Spirit has revealed to us a sin that we were not aware of before, then it tells us that God is proceeding with His glorious work of cleansing us from all unrighteousness. But when the Holy Spirit does reveal that wickedness in us, we do need to make a choice. The choice will always be ours. God will never force us to obey. He gives us the power of choice. While the power to overcome sin belongs to God, the choice will always be ours.

We see this lesson taught when Jesus healed the man who had been a paralytic for thirty-eight years. Jesus said to the paralytic, “Wilt thou be made whole?” The impotent man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.” John 5:6-9.

As soon as the man obeyed the words of Jesus he was healed. He did not say to Jesus, “Heal me first and then I will get up.” Oh no, he believed the words of Jesus, and as he rose he was healed.

How can I discover my hidden sins that I might be both forgiven and cleansed?

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Psalm 119:9-11

In this Bible text, we see that we are to take heed to God’s Word and with our whole heart seek after God. If we allow the Word to be hid in our hearts, then will we not wander from His commandments.

The apostle Paul would have us focus on the precious promises of God to experience the cleansing power of His Word, saying, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1

When we study the Bible, we must mesh our study with this prayer of the psalmist, saying, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:2



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As we read earlier, Paul tells us that “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27.

I would encourage everyone to read through the Bible. Take it one verse at a time and own each verse. In other words, take the time to understand what you are reading, that you might receive the rich blessing that God has for you in that verse.

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