

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

JAMES 3:1-18, FAITH TEST 4: SELF-CONTROL

- A. A Christian without self-control is foolish (1 - 12)
1. The importance of controlling the tongue (1 - 5)
 - a. A special warning (1 - 2),
 - 1) Not everyone should teach (1), *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*
 - a) There is a stricter judgment for teachers.
 - 1] Every idle word will be weighed at the Judgment, Mt. 12:36-37, *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*
 - 2] The pretense of knowledge adds to the teacher's responsibility.
 - 3] Thomas Manton, *do not rashly give your opinion about things concerning the faith.*
 - b) Some seek the position for wrong reasons
 - 1] 1 Timothy 1:6-7, *Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*
 - 2] Philippians 1:15-17, *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.*
 - 3] Thomas Aquinas, *Of course, in teaching as in other careers it is not the profession that does honor to the man, but the man to his profession.*
 - c) Teachers of the Bible have grave responsibility
 - 1] They are to teach according to apostolic instruction, 2 Timothy 1:13-14, *Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*
 - 2] False teaching incurs judgment, Galatians 1:8, *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*
 - 3] A. T. Robertson, *The teacher uses his tongue constantly and so is in particular peril on this score.*
 - 2) Everyone needs to be careful in speech (2), *For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.*
 - a) Sin is a universal condition, 1 John 1:8, *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
 - b) The tongue is difficult to control.
 - 1] Proverbs 10:19, *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.*
 - 2] Proverbs 13:3, *Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.*
 - 3] Isaiah 6:5, *And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*
 - 3) Anyone who assumes the position of teacher needs to be careful
 - a) Those in positions of formal leadership: pastors, elders, teachers.
 - b) Those who would instruct others informally.
 - c) Those who feel a calling to admonish, reprove and warn others, 1 John 5:16, *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death.*
 - d) Guidelines teachers should follow
 - 1] Don't teach out of pride and self-conceit.
 - 2] Don't teach to shame but to restore.
 - 3] Don't be unmerciful.
 - 4] Don't condemn in matters of Christian liberty.
 - 5] Don't be too free to discuss a private matter with others.
 - 6] Do remember your own weaknesses, Bernard on hearing of a fallen brother, cried out, *He is fallen today, and I may tomorrow.*

- b. Powerful illustrations (3-5)
- 1) Horses, (3) ***If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.***
 - a) A horse follows his mouth which is guided by a bridle.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *It is the same with horses as it is with humans. If we can control the tongue, we can bring the whole animal under control.*
 - 2) Ships, (4), ***Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.***
 - a) A ship follows the rudder which is guided by a pilot.
 - b) A controlled tongue can accomplish great things.
 - 3) Tongue, (5), ***So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!***
 - a) A person gets into trouble when he is guided by the pride of his mouth.
 - b) The tongue is compared to a small fire which engulfs a great forest.
2. Difficulty in controlling the tongue (6-12)
- a. It is dangerous (6), ***And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.***
 - 1) *world of unrighteousness*
 - a) Philip Hughes, *...the tongue has more destructive power than a hydrogen bomb, for the bomb's power is physical and temporal, whereas the tongue's is spiritual and eternal.*
 - b) R. V. G. Tasker, *...all the evil characteristics of a fallen world, its covetousness, its idolatry, its blasphemy, its lust, its rapacious greed, find expression through the tongue.*
 - 2) *staining the whole body*
 - a) It infects man with sin and guilt.
 - b) D. Edmond Hiebert, *From the context it seems best to accept that James thinks of the tongue as a vast system of iniquity.*
 - 3) *entire course of life* (wheel of birth)
 - a) Marvin Vincent, *This revolving wheel is kindled by the tongue, and rolls on in destructive blaze.*
 - b) Thomas Manton, *There is no action, no age, no state that can escape its influence.*
 - 4) *set on fire by hell*
 - a) Hell is the source of the tongue's destructive nature.
 - b) Thomas Manton, "When you feel this heat on your spirit, remember from what hearth these coals were gathered."
 - b. It is hard to tame (7 - 8), ***For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.***
 - 1) Man has exhibited his dominion over creation.
 - 2) Man continually fails to control his tongue (8a), Adamson, *Man can bridle and break a horse, but it cannot reduce the tongue to discipline.*
 - 3) The tongue is extremely dangerous (8b), Bernard observed that the tongue kills three things at once, *the person who is slandered (his reputation), the person to whom it is told (believes a lie), and himself (sin of defamation).*
 - 4) The tongue can be controlled.
 - a) By God, Psalm 141:3, *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!*
 - b) By choice, Ephesians 4:29, *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

- c. It is inconsistent (9 - 12)
 - 1) Mankind is hypocritical (9 - 10), *With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*
 - a) Man blesses God with his tongue but curses man who is made in God's image with his tongue.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Not only is this phenomenon contrary to the will of God, it is also contrary to the natural order of things.*
 - 2) Nature is consistent (11 - 12), *Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*
 - a) Illustrations
 - 1] A fountain pours forth water that is either bitter or sweet.
 - 2] A fig tree produces figs.
 - 3] An olive tree produces olives.
 - 4] Salt water remains salt water.
 - b) Thomas Thomas Manton, *Nature abhors hypocrisy.* I would add, so does God.

B. A Christian with self-control is wise (13 - 18)

- 1. Recognition: Who has wisdom 13, *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.*
 - a. Qualifications of a teacher
 - 1) Wisdom, Tom Constable, *the ability to view life from God's perspective.*
 - 2) Understanding, mental perception and comprehension
 - b. The result
 - 1) *good conduct*, self-control
 - 2) Thomas Manton, *True wisdom ends in good behavior...knowledge is only like a jewel in a toad's head.*
 - c. Wise actions are bathed in humility
 - 1) A circular truth: wisdom is evident in humility which comes from wisdom.
 - 2) Marvin Vincent, *Knowledge is proud that she has learned so much, wisdom is humble that she knows no more.*
 - 3) Colossians 3:12, *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,*
- 2. Rejection: What wisdom is not (14 - 16)
 - a. Wisdom is not self-centered 14, *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*
 - 1) *bitter jealousy*, pride of one's knowledge with disdain for the knowledge of others.
 - 2) *selfish ambition*, great concern over one's position instead of commitment to properly teach the truth.
 - 3) *in your heart*, the fountain that supplies the tongue.
 - 4) *false to the truth*, not living or believing what one teaches.
 - b. Self-centered wisdom is not from God (15), *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*
 - 1) *earthly*, centered in man.
 - 2) *natural*, as opposed to spiritual.
 - 3) *demonic*, sourced in Satan.
 - c. Discord accompanies self-centered wisdom (16), *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*
 - 1) *disorder*, lack of unity.
 - 2) every vile practice, disunity nurtures sin.
 - 3) Ronald Blue, *A truly wise person does not seek glory or gain; he is gracious and giving.*

3. Reception: What wisdom is (17), *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*
 - a. Characteristics of heavenly wisdom
 - 1) *pure*, true.
 - 2) *peaceable*, pursues unity.
 - 3) *gentle*, considerate of others.
 - 4) *open to reason*, willing to consider thoughts and opinions of others.
 - 5) *full of mercy and good fruits*, other-centered evidenced by good works.
 - 6) *impartial*, devoted to God, not double-minded.
 - 3) *sincere*, without hypocrisy.
 - c. How can we receive wisdom from God?
 - 1) Reverence, Psalms 111:10, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*
 - 2) Conversion, 1 Corinthians 1:30, *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,*
 - 3) Scripture, Colossians 3:16, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*
 - 4) Prayer, James 1:5, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*
4. Result: What wisdom produces (18), *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*
 - a. *a harvest of righteousness*, righteousness is the fruit of a wise life.
 - b. *sown in peace*, righteousness grows in the lives of those who seek peace.
 - c. Righteousness is formed in those who seek wisdom and pursue peace.
 - d. Donald Burdick, *To 'raise a harvest of righteousness' demands a certain kind of climate. A crop of righteousness cannot be produced in the climate of bitterness and self-seeking. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace.*

CONCLUSION

- A. A self-controlled life is not a self-centered life but an others-centered life.
- B. A self-controlled life includes the control of the tongue.
- B. Self-control in the spiritual life is evident when one lives what he says in love.