

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

James 3:1-4

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read James Chapter 3, and today we will read verses 1-4.

The Epistle of James emphasizes that faith and works go hand in hand, with faith preceding works. In chapter 2, it is repeatedly mentioned that in the matter of being saved by grace, once we believe, God justifies us as righteous. This is what Paul referred to as justification by faith in Romans and Galatians. This is positional justification, which is toward God. Based on this positional justification, James encourages the saints to live a life full of virtues through faith, bearing witness to others. James calls this justification by works, where faith is perfected by works. Good works are the result of our souls becoming sanctified, allowing us to bear witness to others, which is dispositional justification.

We must remember that James' role was that of an elder in the church in Jerusalem, and his primary burden was to serve the Jewish saints. These saints, having a background in Judaism, joined the Jerusalem church after believing in Jesus Christ. Like in Jesus' time, the church in Jerusalem also faced persecution from Jewish leaders, including priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They detested the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who upheld the law publicly but oppressed orphans and widows and seized others' properties in private. From the Pharisees, they understood that works without faith are false, which is the hypocrisy that Jesus Christ condemned the most.

Jesus Christ frequently condemned the Pharisees during His ministry on earth. Perhaps this is one of the reasons they abandoned Judaism to believe in Jesus Christ. After gaining faith, James encouraged them to continue moving forward, to attain the salvation of their souls, and to live a life of good virtues, bearing witness to others. James reminded the saints that faith without works is dead.

James did not focus on works without faith because the Jewish saints he served had already seen through the Pharisees' hypocrisy. Therefore, that was not James' burden. James' burden was for people to live out various virtues in faith after being saved by grace, and James chapters 3 to 5 elaborate on these virtues in life.

Many look down on the Epistle of James and regard these three chapters as ethical teachings, which completely misunderstand the Epistle of James. James was a pious man who led by example, often kneeling in prayer, drawing grace from Jesus Christ by faith to live a life full of virtues. He himself was persecuted by the Jewish Sanhedrin and was eventually martyred. How could he teach the saints to follow the path of the Pharisees? Therefore, when reading the Epistle of James, we must consider the perspective of life to measure and interpret the text, which is the true intent of James.

Verse 1: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

James begins with "My brethren," indicating that he is addressing the saints in the church, who have already been saved by grace and are now walking the path of sanctification to attain the salvation of their souls. James reminds them, "Let not many of you become teachers."

Generally, teachers have two characteristics: First, they possess wisdom and understanding; second, they can teach, primarily through verbal instruction. Chapter 3 develops along these two lines: verses 2-12 pertain to teaching about words, and verses 13-18 pertain to teaching about wisdom. Verse 1 serves as an introduction and the key to opening chapter 3.

James says, "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." The subject here is "we," and based on who "we" refers to, this verse can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that "we" refers to teachers. James tells us not to desire to be teachers because teachers will receive a stricter judgment or a more severe trial. Those who desire to be teachers often

think highly of themselves, making them prone to arrogance and self-conceit, enjoying showing off their superiority through teaching others. Such people are not easily helped by the Holy Spirit, and their teachings are often based on their own opinions. At the judgment seat of Christ, their words will be judged.

Jesus said in Matthew 23:8, "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren." Jesus wanted His disciples not to be called 'Rabbi,' because Christ is their common Teacher, and they are all brothers and sisters. The same applies to today's church. Christ is the Lord of the church, Christ is our common Teacher, and we all learn together in Christ's school and are brothers and sisters to each other.

Of course, there is another aspect to consider. In the church, there is indeed the role of a teacher. In Ephesians 4:8, Paul says that God gives various gifts to men. In 4:11, he lists many different gifts, including the gift of teaching. So, a teacher is a gift from God to the church. How does God give these gifts? In 1 Corinthians 12:11, it says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." These gifts come from the Holy Spirit, who sovereignly distributes them as He wills. The gift of teaching is not something that can be acquired by natural preference or ability; it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit as He wills.

A true teacher does not just teach truth only but also brings people to Christ, helping them to receive help directly from Christ. This differs from the worldly teacher's duties of impart principles, teach knowledge, and resolve doubts, because spiritual matters can only be revealed to us by Christ through the Holy Spirit. The teacher's role is to help people learn how to receive help directly from the Holy Spirit in this process.

The second interpretation is that "we" refers to the learners. Some people, when encountering difficulties, like to seek advice from various teachers, yet they lack the ability to discern. When different teachers give different opinions, they become confused. In fact, our true help comes from God, so when we face situation that we don't understand, we should first seek help from God rather than from people. If

you habitually listen to people rather than God, you will face stricter judgment before Christ's judgment seat because you valued human opinions over God's will.

After James points out that not many should become teachers, he continues in verses 2-12 to instruct the saints on what kind of learning should take place in terms of speech.

Verse 2: "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."

James begins by saying, "For we all stumble in many things." Here we see James' humility, as he includes himself among those who stumble. He was recognized as a pious man, known as James the Just, but he admitted that he stumbled in many things, which may also be why he often knelt in prayer. Based on his own experience, among the many areas of stumbling, he particularly highlights stumbling in words because it is the most difficult. He further declares that if anyone does not stumble in words, he is a perfect man.

James had seen the example of a perfect man, he's Jesus Christ's brother in flesh. He lived with Jesus in Nazareth for nearly 30 years and saw the example of a perfect man. But James could not be one. From experience he knew the most difficult thing is to bridle his own tongue so to avoid stumbling in words. He declared that whoever can bridle the tongue can bridle the whole body.

James uses the term "bridle" to indicate that when people encounter situations, their first direct reaction is often from the flesh, so they need to bridle it, not letting the flesh take the lead. Among the many members of the body, the tongue is the first to react, which is why James reminds us in James 1:19 to be slow to speak. What we say with our mouths is what we think in our hearts, so James says not to react instantly. Our souls need to be governed by the Holy Spirit, and our minds need to be purified by the Holy Spirit before words come out of our mouths.

The mouth expresses the heart. If the heart is filled with filthy and immoral things, the words spoken will defile and corrupt others. Studies show that an adult speaks an average of 16,000 words a day, and it is difficult to avoid stumbling in so many words. Dear brothers and sisters, we should heed James' reminder to be careful with our words, not reacting immediately with our speech but pausing before God, accepting the Holy Spirit's governance, so we do not commit serious errors in our words.

Some people often use the excuse of being straightforward and quick-tongued, thinking it is a virtue and showing their true character. However, we must remember that sin resides in our flesh, and if you react instantly from the flesh, it is Satan speaking through you, revealing Satan's character. What is there to boast about? After being saved by grace, we should be partakers of God's nature, especially in our words, speaking words of grace that can edify others. If we speak Satan's words, it brings disaster from our mouth, harming both the speaker and the listener.

Verse 3: "Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body."

If you put a bit in a horse's mouth, it will go east if you want it to go east, west if you want it to go west, run fast if you want it to run fast, and stop if you want it to stop. A small bit can control a large, strong horse. Of course, the bit itself has no will; it is merely a tool that makes the horse obey the rider's will.

Here, James compares a person's words to a bit. The bit can make a horse obey a person's will, allowing one to control the entire body of the horse. Similarly, a person's words are small compared to the person, but if the sovereignty over words is handed over to God, we can obey God, and God can control our entire being. Indeed, our words are the key to our obedience to God. A person who can let God control his words can let God control his entire body, making him an obedient person to God. In essence, words express a person's heart, and being able to let God control one's words means letting God control one's heart. Since all the issues

of life spring from the heart, a person whose heart obeys God will naturally walk in God's ways throughout his life.

Verse 4: "Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires."

At that time, ships were primarily sailboats, and their forward movement was powered by the wind. Ships were large and could carry lots of goods, being driven by the wind to deliver cargo to distant places. Ships were extremely useful transportation tools, but compared to the ship, the rudder was very small. However, without the rudder, the ship could not go where the helmsman intended.

James compares a person to a ship and a person's words to the ship's rudder, with the helmsman naturally being God. If we want to be useful in God's hands, able to transport God's riches to the designated places, we must submit our words to God's control. A person whose words are not governed by God, no matter how rich he is, he cannot become a useful vessel for God. Only when our words are controlled by God can we deliver the riches we bear according to God's will to where they are needed.

Dear brothers and sisters, in these few verses, James tells us that our words are key to our obedience to God and to being useful in God's hands. Only when our words can be controlled by God can we obey God and be useful in His hands.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for reminding us through the Epistle of James that if a person does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man. We confess that we often do not submit our words to the control of the Holy Spirit and frequently say things that offend others and cause us regret. Help us to learn to be governed in our words, and since words come from our hearts, first cleanse our hearts so that we may purely love You and purely desire to serve the church. Also, help me to serve in the church with clean hands and a pure heart. Refine my words so that I may be an obedient person to You and a useful vessel in Your hands. Bless my various services in the church. I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.