

10.24.10 / James 1:26-27**Passage Insight**

James has told us in verse 5 that we can ask for and receive wisdom from God if we lack it (and we all lack it). He then tells us in verse 18 that it's by God's own will that we are able to be saved and brought forth by the word of truth. We then see in the next grouping of verses a change that begins to take place when we have the implanted word: our speech changes, our emotions change, and our overall actions change. This leads us to verses 26-27, where it becomes even more clear what a God-honoring life actually looks like. Let's examine these verses to see why this is the case.

It's first interesting to note what is said in verse 26 about worthless religion. If we think we are religious but are actually NOT religious (judged by our actions, as we'll see in just a moment), we are actually deceiving ourselves. Just as we are not tempted by God, but rather lured and enticed by OUR OWN desires (verse 14), when our tongue is unbridled and out of control, we are the ones deceiving ourselves. When we rightly see our part in this deception, we have a hope of seeing the solution, God.

The fact of the matter is that whether or not we like it, our actions reveal what we truly believe, where we truly put our faith. Matthew 5:44-45 says this: "... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. . . .". We prove ourselves children of God by the way we live our lives. With regard to speech, we should ask the question, "What should our speech sound like if we are truly children of God?" Verse 19 begins to shed some light on this when we see that those who have the implanted word of God should "... be quick to hear, slow to speak. . . ." We also learn more about speech when we look at the words of Jesus. In John 5:30, Jesus says, "I can do nothing on my own. . . I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." With His every action, He ALWAYS did His Father's will, including in His speech, because He constantly sought and only did His Father's will. Where do we fail to seek the Lord's will for our speech?

What does an unbridled tongue look and sound like? It is one that is anchored not in the unchanging will of God, but rather in the fickle desires and whims of the human heart. If our tongues are speaking what WE want, speaking from OUR opinions, speaking from a perceived right to self-expression regardless of consequence, then they are unbridled. By contrast, however, if they are speaking the truth of Scripture, if they are speaking the words of Jesus, who is Truth itself (John 14:6), then they are bridled and under proper control. Bridles are not bad. They tame something wild and allow it to be used as a blessing rather than being dangerous. Beautiful!

In verse 27 the Lord reveals to us some of the fruit that is seen when someone truly has religion that is of worth and that has value. What makes visiting widows and orphans in their affliction actions of value? Because these actions are the fruit of a changed heart, a heart that is being made like God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us that for those of us who follow Jesus, we are being changed into the image of Christ. As our hearts change, we become like God, and so we do what God does. The proof is in our actions, which are a trustworthy gauge of the affections of our hearts. If our heart's orientation is toward the Lord (and no longer toward ourselves), our actions will reflect this. If they do not, then it's clear evidence that our hearts are instead still oriented toward ourselves, and it's worth examining why and where this is the case, specifically.

So what makes caring for orphans and widows like God? Because in this we see that God care for those who cannot care for themselves, which is the gospel! This is what the Lord has done for us, reached out to those who couldn't

reach out to Him because we were stuck in our own sin and self-service (Romans 5:8). Remarkably, as He saves us, He changes us to be like Him and gives us the capacity to reach out to others as He does, in HIS name. Finally, we find ourselves unstained from the world when our actions are motivated not by the things of this world (sin), but rather motivated by a heart that has been changed by Christ. This is what we are to do for the world, to act from changed hearts and love the world as God loves the world (John 13:34)!

Application Questions

Taming the Tongue

- 1) Taming the tongue is like taming a wild beast. Left to its own instincts, a wild beast will kill and destroy, but once tamed, it can serve and bless. How does your own tongue kill and destroy right now (gossip, hateful words, vulgar humor, venting anger without regard for the heart behind it, others)?
- 2) What's allowing this to happen (remember verse 26 about deceiving our own hearts)?
- 3) Deception is rooted in lies. Assuming you're deceiving yourself in some way, what lies do you tell yourself that keep you from self-control?
- 4) What truths of the Lord replace these lies?
- 5) Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus IS truth itself. How can you anchor yourself to Him (to truth) all the more this week?

Tongue as a Blessing

- 1) When the tongue is tamed, it can be a blessing instead of a weapon. How does Jesus use His words as a blessing to others when He speaks?
- 2) Jesus never sinned with His words, because, as we see in John 5:30, Jesus says, "I can do nothing on my own. . . I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." He ALWAYS did His Father's will, and He knew it because He sought it (remember that we can seek the Lord's wisdom, James 1:5, if we lack it). This is what allows Jesus to speak blessings. Where do you speak out of your own mind, rather than the will of God?
- 3) What would it look like for you to seek the Father's will in how to use your speech as a blessing to others?

Before and After

- 1) Read Jesus' words in Luke 6:43-44 ("For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit.") A change such as new spiritual birth must result in fruit that reflects this change. Where does your life reflect this new birth?
- 2) Where does your life resemble instead what we are before we're saved by Christ (your old nature)?
- 3) What's behind this?
- 4) Where are your good deeds and good words simply a matter of ritual rather than a matter of heart change?
- 5) Only the Holy Spirit can change you and bring about His fruit. Where are you trusting yourself to do the work instead of trusting the Spirit?
- 6) If you struggle to see the disconnect between what you should be and what you are, who is someone you can ask who will tell you the blunt truth about what they see in your life that resembles your old nature?

Sources

- Prayer
- Bible Speaks Today
- Barclay