

James 3:1-2 — We need living faith to control what we say

This week we continue our study of James, covering James 3:1-2

Memory Verses

James 1:2-4 NKJV

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Anointed by God and Appointed by Man

James 3:1-2 NKJV

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

v 1 **Let not many of you become teachers:** As we discussed last week, being teachers in God's church is more than a matter of being gifted or anointed; there is an additional dimension of appropriate character and right living — a man (or woman, if she is teaching other women or children — 1 Timothy 2:12) must be appointed by man; those who have observed their good conduct, reputation and godly character. One place these criteria are described is:

1 Timothy 3:1-13 NKJV

This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; ³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

⁸ Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. ¹¹ Likewise, *their wives must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Do you thing that these character traits are only for those who have a position of authority in a church? Of course not. These are God's will for every believer. These character traits are the character goal posts for every believer. I have borrowed the list of character traits along with their simple and concise definitions from Gene Getz's book, *The Measure of a Man*, so we can see them at a glance. The men are currently going through this book. I can recommend it to everyone.

- Above reproach (a man of good reputation)
- The husband of one wife (morally pure)
- Temperate (balanced in words and actions, not impulsive)
- Prudent (wise and humble)
- Respectable (good role model)
- Hospitable (unselfish and generous, willing to share)
- Able to teach (communicates sensitively in a nonthreatening and non-defensive manner)
- Not addicted to wine (not addicted to substances)
- Not self-willed (not self-centred and controlling)
- Not quick-tempered (void of anger that becomes sinful — quick to listen and slow to anger)
- Not pugnacious (not abusive)
- Gentle (sensitive, loving, and kind)
- Peaceable (non-argumentative and non-divisive)
- Free from the love of money (not materialistic)
- Manages his own household well (a good husband and father)
- Loving what is good (pursues godly activities)
- Just (wise, discerning, non-prejudiced, and fair)
- Devout (holy, devoted to God)
- Self-controlled (disciplined)

As I said before, these character traits are God's will for every believer, and will be a part of the criteria that Jesus will use when He rewards us; yet as we learned last week, it's always God who does the work or change in us, so we can't take credit for it. Remember that God has already given us everything we need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3-4). So let's be like Paul, running the race of the christian walk with a mind set to win, to receive the various crowns and rewards for faithful service when we stand before Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! ²⁵ All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ²⁶ So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. ²⁷ I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 NLT

As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸ And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

So, in summary, for a man or woman (if she is teaching other women and/or children) to become a teacher in the church, they must be anointed by God (demonstrate that they have the gift of teaching), and appointed by man (others vouch for or observe their godly character).

Can a man be perfect in this life?

James 3:2 NKJV

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.

v 2 **For we all stumble in many things:** David Guzik: “The greater accountability of teachers is especially sobering in light of our common weaknesses. After all, we all stumble in many things. The ancient Greek word translated stumble does not imply a fatal fall, but something that trips us up and hinders our spiritual progress.

...James included himself among those who stumble. Yet he did not excuse his or our stumbling. We know that we all stumble, but we should all press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by less stumbling.”

Another thing to notice is that this is another of the several verses in the Bible which tell us that all men sin (also including 1 Kings 8:46; Job 14:4; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; and 1 John 1:8, 10). Let's read some of them:

1 Kings 8:46 NKJV

“When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin),

Proverbs 20:9 NLT

Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart; I am pure and free from sin”? [no-one]

Ecclesiastes 7:20 NLT

Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.

The last scripture that we'll read concerning how none of us can ever be perfect while in this earthly body, because we are still influenced by the sin nature that is attached to it, is 1 John 1:8-2:2. These verses not only tell us that Christians will continue to sin, but also that God has made a provision for our sins. However, John says very clearly that he is not saying this so that we will sin more, but rather that we will all realise the

terrible cost of our sin, and therefore run from sin, avoiding sin, because we are aware of the additional wrath of God that was poured out on Jesus for every sin that we commit. If we sin wilfully, then we are demonstrating a very callous attitude towards Jesus — “yeah, so what if I sin more, I can do what I want; it will just mean more suffering for Jesus on the cross.” The more we really love Jesus, the more we really understand and appreciate what Jesus did on the cross for us, the more we will run from sin, as we realise that every extra sin we commit was extra pain and torment that Jesus had to endure on the cross.

1 John 1:8-2:2 NLT

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. ¹⁰ **If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.**

¹ **My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin,** we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones [propitiation] for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Again, if we really love Jesus, if we really appreciate what Jesus did on the cross for us, then we will run from sin, as we realise that every extra sin we commit resulted in extra pain and torment that Jesus had to endure on the cross. Let's be like the writer to the Hebrews when he wrote in:

Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Summary

So much for the doctrine of sinless perfection that some people, including some well known bible teachers, claim to have achieved — I have heard them claim that they don't sin any more. They are lying. We know this from what James has just said, “for we all stumble in many things,” and as David Guzik explained, “We know that we all stumble, but we should all press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by less stumbling.” In other words, we don't become sinless in this life, but we do sin less. This is the mark of a true believer — growing in holiness, purity, and righteousness.

Becoming Mature and Complete in our Speech

v ² **If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect [mature] man:** The NLT says it like this: “For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.”

What this verse is saying is that what we say is a measure spiritual maturity for teachers and for all Christians. Jesus teaches us in Matthew 12:34–37 that words are the revelation of the inner character.

Matthew 12:34-37 NLT

You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. ³⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. ³⁶ And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. ³⁷ The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.”

Again, the way a person speaks is a true reflection of their heart. So what are some examples of good and wholesome speech and evil or wicked speech? We'll start with wicked or evil speech.

Using our tongues for evil

— We **stumble in word** about ourselves with our boasting, exaggeration, and selective reporting; in other words we are lying.

John 8:44 NKJV

You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Ephesians 4:25 NLT

So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbours the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

— We **stumble in word** when we don't teach what the bible teaches. According to the Bible, in the last days, indeed the days we now live in, will be characterised by false doctrine and a false gospel. Examples of false doctrine include:

- rejection of the six literal days of creation
- a works based gospel (a rejection of the gospel of Grace)
- the prosperity gospel (come to Jesus because He will make your life better, no repentance or change in lifestyle required)
- rejection of the deity of Jesus Christ
- rejection of the resurrection
- rejection of the Trinity
- rejection of a literal interpretation of prophecy (prophetic books allegorised), which leads to:
- the rejection of the nation of Israel as God's chosen people (replacement theology or kingdom now theology), which leads to:
- the rejection of the pretribulational rapture, the tribulation, and the Millennial reign of Jesus, which are all based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic scriptures.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 NKJV

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

— We **stumble in word** about others, with our criticism, gossip, slander, cruelty, two-facedness, and anger; or with flattery and insincere words meant to gain favour.

James 3:14-15 NLT

But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, **don't cover up the truth** with boasting and lying. ¹⁵ For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

1 Timothy 5:13 NKJV

And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also **gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.**

I think that we all know the damage that idle talk, gossip and slander can do. I think it's true for all of us that the most harm we can do to others is with our tongue. As Christians, we must be careful to not let our prayer meetings become gossip meetings; "Oh, did you hear about so and so, we really need to pray for him."

Using our tongues for good — being filled with the Spirit

Now we will look at ways we can build each other up with our tongues. There are two important aspects to this. Firstly, we need to be living by the power of the Spirit, and secondly, be a student of the word of God, immersing ourselves in its pages. Let's look first at how we need to be filled with the Spirit if we are going to be able to use our tongues to be a blessing to others and God.

Ephesians 5:18-21 NKJV

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but **be filled with the Spirit**, ¹⁹ **speaking to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and **making melody in your heart to the Lord**, ²⁰ **giving thanks** always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ **submitting to one another** in the fear of God.

Being **filled with the Spirit** is contrasted with being **drunk with wine**. Why? Here are a couple of quotes:

David Guzik: "Paul's grammar here clearly says, "be *constantly being filled* with the Holy Spirit. ...The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event that we live off of the rest of our days. It is a constant filling, asking to be filled, and receiving the filling by faith. ...Much of the weakness, defeat and lethargy in our spiritual life can be attributed to the fact that we are not constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit.

...The ancient Greek grammar for **be filled** also indicates two other important things. First, the verb is *passive*, so this is not a manufactured experience [it is something done to us, not something we conjure up ourselves]. Second, it is *imperative* [a command], so this is not an optional experience.

...Paul *contrasts* the effect of the Holy Spirit with the state of drunkenness. Alcohol is a depressant; it "loosens" people because it depresses their self-control, their wisdom, their balance and judgment. The Holy Spirit has an exactly opposite effect. He is a stimulant; He moves every aspect of our being to better and more perfect performance."

Moule: “...it is a thing supernatural. It is a state of man wholly unattainable by training, by reasoning, by human wish and will. It is nothing less than—God in command and control of man’s whole life, flowing everywhere into it, that He may flow fully and freely out of it in effects around.”

Why does Paul command to be **filled with the Spirit**? Because as we will see soon, the only other alternative is to be full of ourselves or controlled by our sinful nature.

What does Ephesians 5:18-21 describe as being the effects of being filled with or controlled by the Spirit?

- speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- making melody in your heart to God
- giving thanks always
- submitting to each other in the fear of God

Here again, we have living faith producing living works and words. None of these effects are possible if we are depending on or operating by our own strength — our sinful nature. We may be able to fake humility and love for a little while, but eventually our true colours will come through (Galatians 5:15-26). Remember that living faith is faith in God, together with submission to God (repentance), which means that God then lives inside of us, and we partake of His divine nature. Only then can we be **“filled with the Spirit”** or “empowered by the Spirit” — the Holy Spirit enables us to speak God’s words as God speaks through us. As Romans 8:5-6 tells us, we are controlled by the Spirit, and not our sinful nature.

Romans 8:5-6, 12-13 NLT

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. **But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.**

... ¹² Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³ For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

I would like to read the quote from Moule again: “...it is a thing supernatural. It is a state of man wholly unattainable by training, by reasoning, by human wish and will. It is nothing less than—God in command and control of man’s whole life, flowing everywhere into it, that He may flow fully and freely out of it in effects around.”

We see this concept of being either controlled by our sinful nature, or, the Spirit of God further explained in:

Galatians 5:15-26 NLT

But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

¹⁶ **So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.** ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸ But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, **impurity**, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, **hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,** ²¹ **envy**, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ **Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.** ²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.**

So you see that we are not able to control our tongues (what we say and how we say it) just by trying to be good. Eventually, the selfishness of our old nature will be revealed, if not by our words, then by our tone of voice. As Christians with a new heart, and new desires, we also need to be willing to allow God to speak and work through us, otherwise we will end up like Paul in Romans 7:21-25, knowing what is right, but not having the power or strength to put it into practice.

No verse states this principle of God's good desire to control us more clearly than:

Galatians 2:20 NLT

My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We could rephrase this as, **“It is not longer I who speak, but Christ speaks through me.”** Think about it. If the Spirit is controlling me, then this is literally true. The words I speak will be living words, straight from the heart of God. As a consequence, the words that come from my mouth — God's words — will build others up, be full of wisdom and love, and will be willing to submit to others and not fight for my rights. Of course the opposite is true; my words can originate from my sinful nature and be hurtful, deceptive, manipulative, and wrathful.

You may be thinking, but how is it that I can be walking in the Spirit one moment, speaking words that glorify God, but the next minute be tearing someone down? That's because walking with the Lord is a moment by moment choice. Each new thought must be brought into submission to God, every new situation must be given over to the Lord, and each new hurt must be forgiven, if we are to continue walking in the Spirit (Galatians) or continue to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians). This is why things can change so quickly. Also, the more we are in the Word, and the more we are obeying, then the easier it will be to submit to God's leading in our lives.

Using our tongues for good — the effect of the word of God

Another aspect of how we can speak to build each other up and glorify God is not just submit to God's lordship over us, but also to immerse ourselves in the Word of God.

Colossians 3:16-17 NKJV

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatever you do **in word or deed**, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through Him.

Remember what Jesus said about the connection between the word of God and the Spirit of God.

John 14:26 AMP

But the Comforter (Counsellor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthenener, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], **He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.**

The main point here is that the Holy Spirit is limited by us in what He can remind us of in that He can only remind us of what we have actually read in the Word of God. If we haven't read it, then the Holy Spirit can't bring it to remembrance. How are we supposed to demonstrate wisdom in our speech if the Word of God is not available in our hearts to bring to remembrance. How am I meant to encourage or exhort someone if I don't know or haven't studied the relevant scriptures. This is a beautiful thing. Our responsibility is to read the Word of God. It is the Spirit's responsibility to give us the understanding and to lead us into all truth (John 16:13), and remind us of what we have read when we need it. 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 show how and why we need to be open to the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit, both as we read the Word of God, and when we speak to others.

1 Corinthians 2:9-16 NLT

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
what God has prepared
for those who love him.”

¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

¹³ When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. ¹⁴ But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. ¹⁶ For,

“Who can know the Lord's thoughts?
Who knows enough to teach him?”

But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

Conclusion

- It is God's will for all Christians that our character changes to become more like Christ.
- We will all continue to sin while we are in our mortal body because of the influence of our sinful human nature, but, it is God's will for us to grow in grace and righteousness and so although we don't become sinless, we do sin less.
- It is God's will that we grow and are changed by the Holy Spirit to become mature and complete, especially in how we speak to others.
- We have only two options; either we are controlled by our sinful nature, and so produce the fruit of the sinful nature, or, we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, and so produce the fruit of the Spirit.
- We need to be in the Word of God if we are to become wise and able to comfort and exhort one another.

Let us remain humble and continue to ask God to fill us with His Spirit so our lives are under His control and will bring much glory and praise to Him.

John 15:5 NKJV

"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me [by your own strength and resources] you can do nothing."

Philippians 4:13 NKJV

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.