

NOT MANY SHOULD TEACH

James 3:1-12

Our speech has the potential to do great good or great harm. Our passage today talks about the “tongue”, but we understand that our “tongue” is driven by our character. Jesus made this clear on the Day of Rejection when He rebuked the Pharisees (Matt. 12:34).

YOUR SPEECH REVEALS YOUR CHARACTER

If you want to know a person’s character, listen to their speech, over time and in various circumstances. Your speech reveals your character, particularly when you are angry, hurt, or afraid. Those to whom James wrote had a chronic problem with their speech. Though they were Jewish Christians they had a significant problem with their mouths. We have already seen James confront their troublesome tongues in chapter one (James 1:19-20, 26; 4:11).

His readers had a problem with their speech which really indicated they had a problem with their character.

A SPEECH PROBLEM IS A CHARACTER PROBLEM

They possessed justification salvation. They were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But many continued to live according to the flesh. They were carnal and it came out in their speech. They needed to be saved from their carnality!

Previously, in 2:14-26, James was concerned they not be misled by the idea that faith alone is sufficient for the Christian life. James knew that if they believed that lie, the sanctification process would come to a halt. Only through faith in action will their character be transformed to become “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”.

Likewise, James knows that God’s Word is absolutely necessary for their sanctification. James insists only spiritually mature men be allowed to teach in their churches. Their spiritual growth and transformation depends upon it.

But how do you practically determine if a man is spiritually mature?

By his speech (James 3:1-2).

A TEMPERATE TONGUE REVEALS A MATURE CHARACTER

A man’s speech reveals his character. In their small fellowships, James’ readers should look to those men who are slow to speak, quick to hear and slow to anger. They should look to those men whose tongues are bridled and under control. They should look to those men who do not speak evil of others. A man whose speech does not stumble in these and many other ways, is a man who has made tremendous progress in sanctification. He is the one who has listened carefully to the Scriptures and applied them to his life. A man righteous in speech is a man righteous in character. He is the one you want teaching and influencing the church.

This is one of the reasons we believe it best to disciple and raise up staff pastors from within our church family. It gives us the ability to thoroughly vet a brother’s speech in a variety of settings and situations over time in order to verify his character. It is also one of the reasons why we do not rush to put people new to the family, into positions of leadership.

Why is this so important for the church?

WORDS HAVE GREAT POWER FOR GOOD AND FOR EVIL.

Words have great power for good and for evil (James 3:3-6).

Words have impact out of proportion to their size. A small bit can control a powerful horse. A large ship is safely guided through stormy seas by a small rudder. Our words, our speech, have the ability to do great good.

But our words also have the ability to do great evil. Words can do great evil. The words of Hitler ignited a world war that killed 70 to 85 million people worldwide. Words have ripped apart innumerable marriages, families and churches. Words cut our Cuyunon brother Michael's heart so deep, he never recovered.

Because words are powerful, the church needs to be very careful to evaluate potential teachers.

THOSE WHO TEACH MUST FIRST BE THOSE TRANSFORMED

Only men who have first been transformed by God's Word should be considered as potential teachers of God's Word. How is our speech transformed? Not from the outside, but from the inside. Our hearts must be changed. Our character must be transformed. Then, our speech will follow. These are the points James makes in verses 7-12. The only way to "tame" the tongue, that is, the only way to clean up your speech is to clean up your heart. Change your heart and your mouth will follow.

The process of sanctification depends upon the teaching of God's Word. Therefore, when considering a brother or sister for a teaching role in one of our ministries here at Grace, we need to pay attention to their speech. Their speech is a window into their character; a temperate tongue reveals a mature character.

WHAT DOES YOUR SPEECH SAY ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER?

This passage is not only about teachers, but applies to all of us. What does your speech say about your character? Is your speech at church significantly different than at home or work? If so, you have a heart problem. If your speech is vulgar, critical, angry, sarcastic, manipulative, condescending, threatening, boastful etc., these indicate you have serious heart problems. You need to be honest about your condition and serious about addressing these issues with the help of the Word, the Spirit, prayer and your loving brothers and sisters in the church.

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