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## **Our Tongue, So Small, but Serious** **James 3:1-12**

*Joel Portman*

When we venture into this chapter, we recall the teaching of our blessed Lord about our tongues, speech, words, and their effect. He said, in Matthew 12:34, when criticizing the Pharisees who were speaking against Him, "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." That is to say that the tongue and what is said is the most direct expression of what is in the heart, meaning that what is in our hearts will come out in our speech. The solemnity of His words is emphasized in the verses that follow, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matthew 12:35-37). That should make any person want to guard their lips. Perhaps, far better, we need to ask as the psalmist did in Psalm 141:3, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." This passage in James teaches that tongue-control merely by self-effort is virtually impossible! It requires divine wisdom and restraint. Often a good message has been spoiled and its impact lost by "idle (careless) words" being spoken after it. Better to say nothing than to speak and cause harm or spiritual loss.

Proverbs has many verses that refer to the wrong, careless, dangerous, as well as beneficial use of the tongue. The counsel of wisdom enables us to guard our tongues and consider carefully what we say. It's revealing, and often is sad, to quietly listen to the conversation of a group of Christians and what is being said. Surely, if the conversation were recorded and we lis-

tened to it, we would cringe at some of the things that were said, perhaps carelessly, or critically, or as gossip, or otherwise. One should remember that our words are being noted in heaven and we will give account for every idle word. May we seek to do as the apostle Paul exhorted, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Colossians 4:6).

A brief outline of this chapter will help us understand the direction of its teaching. He emphasizes the importance of the tongues' importance and responsibility in its usage in vs. 1-2, then expounds on some of its positive results if used correctly in vs. 3-4. That teaching is balanced in vs. 5-6 by showing its dangerous results if not controlled, and then James shows us our inability to use our words consistently in vs. 7-12. Following that, we learn that divinely imparted wisdom is essential if we are to use our members in a positive way to bless others as he describes the wisdom that is given from above in the last verses.

James has referred to our speech in previous verses in this epistle. In 1:19, he warns us to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath", and we noted that this is the desired pattern that is honoring to the Lord and that expresses His righteousness. Again, in v. 26, he reminds us that true religion will be expressed by one controlling the tongue like one controls an animal, and this is a theme that he reverts to in this chapter (v. 3). In 2:12, he shows us that we are to realize that our speech will be judged by the standard of the perfect law of liberty, that standard that we are held to as a result of the grace of God expressed toward us. So our speech is never far from James' mind in this practical epistle, and it should be our concern, likewise, to practice his exhortations.

### **Seriousness of Controlling our Speech, v. 1-2**

James' teaching begins from the highest level, taking to task the effect of how a teacher might use his tongue. The language and words of any of us will affect some other persons, but how many more will be affected by the words of a teacher? Perhaps he is emphasizing this, especially during the early days of church history since the canon of Scripture wasn't complete, so anyone who taught would be using and applying the Old Testament. It would be easy to misuse and not properly direct its teaching, for instance, by empha-

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ing a binding obligation of the law on believers in this dispensation. That would cause great problems in the hearers, as we note in the case of the Galatian assemblies (Galatians 3:1-3). But it is still true today and this exhortation not to aspire to be teachers should be heeded. It seems strange that we see younger men, possibly recently commended by their assembly to full-time work, rushing to speak on conference platforms and admonishing older saints who have far more experience and maturity than they. Some haven't proved themselves by work nor proved that God will use them, but they want to position themselves as teachers of older believers. Those who taught us when this writer was younger referred to such as those who were "trafficking in unfelt truths". The warning here is that those who taught held a greater responsibility and would be judged according to what they presumed to know. That would make any person careful and restrained from wanting to teach others. Many times we have spoken on some subject and the next day or soon afterward have been tested on our own obedience to that same truth or principle. J. N. Darby wrote, "When we do not know ourselves, it is far easier to teach others than to govern self."

We are reminded by wiser men that the correct attitude of anyone who seeks to teach others should be to do so as a learner. In truth, our blessed Lord is the Teacher, but we note that in Isaiah 50:4, it is said of Him that "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (the one who is taught). C. A. Coates said, "The Lord was the true Disciple; He always spoke as the instructed One, and I do not think anything has much power in the affections of saints but what comes from one who is himself in the spirit of a learner. If we become conscious that one is learning, receiving impressions from God, we like to listen to him, for we are assured that we shall get something." It is as we are listening and allowing the Holy Spirit to open our understanding to divine truth that we will be able to share that which we have learned with others. If it is only a matter of words that we have gained from a book or other form of man's teaching, it is sure to be presented in a dry and non-receivable manner even if it may be the truth. But if it is the truth that has been worked out and manifested in one's life, then it has freshness and real benefit to the hearer.

James warns us that we all stumble, and that could mean that even the teacher is susceptible to falling morally or spiritually. He honestly expresses his

own potential, along with others, to stumble. We trip over something in our pathway usually unintentionally, but this indicates a lack of carefulness in our walk. The same can happen spiritually and morally, and we know of those who once taught others who have had such a fall. When this happens, it has a severe effect on others who have listened to his teaching and who held such a person in high regard, so those who teach must be constantly aware of how dangerous that position can be. We personally stumble, but he could also suggest that we can stumble others by what we teach, and we teach with our lives as well as with our words. Paul reminds Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them...", thus emphasizing more than the words that were taught by others including his mother and grandmother, but also the character of their lives that supported and gave weight to their teaching. It is a man's life and work that gives weight and value to his teaching and this consistency reflects maturity and spiritual development that is expressed in James 3:2 by the term, "perfect man". This doesn't mean sinless perfection, since such teaching is contrary to Scripture, but it means that the individual has developed and matured spiritually and his control of the tongue reflects discipline in every aspect of his life. If we control our speech, or if it is controlled so as to be useful, then we are also exercising the same form of spiritual discipline in life that expresses one's subjection to the Spirit of God.

#### **Positive Results of Speech, v. 3-4**

The thought of bridling the whole body in v. 2 leads James to his first illustration of how a word can control the restless spirit and activity of the flesh in ourselves as well as in others. The bit in the mouth of a horse is very small in comparison with the animal's size, but it effectively directs and restrains the strength and activity of the beast. So we also learn that a "word fitly spoken" (Proverbs 25:11) is not only attractive but also effective. An example might be the words of Caleb in Numbers 13-14 when he sought to restrain the rebellious and unbelieving reaction of the people when they heard the evil report brought by the ten spies. That "bit-like word" can restrain an individual as well as an assembly. And how important is this effect! There is in all of us a tendency to allow pent-up impulses of the flesh to express themselves with results that can be devastating. This writer was once riding a horse that had a strong and restive spirit. One side of the bridle broke, and even though the bit was still in the horse's

mouth, it was very difficult to prevent a disaster from happening. So there needs to be divine control and guidance to harness one's natural strength and ability so that it can be properly utilized or channeled in subjection to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

The "bit-wise use" of the tongue is essential to curb inward tendencies, but when James writes about the rudder's function we know that it is to guide the ship in the proper direction despite external forces that play upon it. Believers and assemblies both experience hostile influences that would seek to turn both from the pathway that is right before God. The word spoken by a wise person can oppose that effect and may preserve the listener(s) on the right path. Cases exist that describe ships in storms that fared well until something caused the rudder to be inoperative or uncontrolled, and in that case, the result often was shipwreck. An uncontrolled tongue can have the same effect spiritually. Consider those in Galatia who were teaching the saints that circumcision and law-keeping were necessary to attain spiritual growth. Or those who evidently were moving among believers and teaching doctrines that contradicted the deity of Christ or the reality of His humanity and who caused John to write to defend these important teachings. Presently, there are the winds of a "new morality" that are causing many professing Christians to lose their moorings and the influences of humanism and worldly desires that have ruined many a child of God and have caused much degeneration in the spiritual quality and exercise of assemblies. All of these must be opposed by skillful use of the tongue to teach and use God's Word to guide and preserve assemblies so that they might go in the proper direction.

#### **Negative Results of Speech, vs. 5-6**

The results of our speech are obviously out of proportion to the size of the member involved. James has compared it to a bit in the mouth of a large animal and the rudder in the stern of a large ship. In v. 5, he considers how it can express arrogant and boastful speech. Then, in vs. 5-8 he compares it to a small fire or poison. We know that with either of these, only a small amount can cause a large disastrous result. Of course, it is not the tongue that is at fault but rather, the mind that is using the tongue. A mind not controlled by the Spirit will express things that are self-exalting and self-centered. This entire section emphasizes the need for tongue control, and James shows how difficult this is. Even the best of men can speak great things of themselves and boast about their own

attainments rather than express words that are helpful to others.

In this section, James sees the tongue as a fire that, no matter how small the flame might be, has the potential to cause catastrophic results. We could hope that the fire would be for good, and it can be if it is controlled. But his illustration sees it producing severe damage to burn up a forest or entire woods. The material to burn is always available and is not at fault; rather, it is the incendiary ability of the flame that is being used in a careless or harmful manner. History is replete with examples of those who incited mob violence or moved large masses of people to respond in an evil manner, i.e., men like Hitler who used oratorical ability along with force to incite hatred against those who were his enemies. Gossiping among believers may be small in its beginning but it can cause strife and divisions in an assembly and result in serious damage to a testimony. Carelessly talking about another believer may harm that person's reputation and result in their spiritual ruin, and this has happened more than once. Our minds go to Doeg, the Edomite, who caused the death of the Lord's priests when he reported to Saul about David's visit to the tabernacle (1 Samuel 21, 22). There are many other examples that illustrate this destructive use of the tongue that would serve to cause us to be careful how it is used by all believers but especially by one who is seen as a teacher. (Notice Psalm 52:2-4, 120:2-4, 140:3). Proverbs 16:23 says, "An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire," so what James says isn't new. Neither is it "old" since it is still the cause of much trouble.

James calls the tongue a "world of iniquity". The word he uses for "world" means an orderly system or arrangement. It is arranged by forces of evil and causes evil results. He might mean that it is composed of or characterized by evil or unrighteousness. Other writers suggest that since "world" is the word that also means "adornment" (1 Peter 3:3), he is saying that it is able to make evil look attractive and enticing to the hearer. The language of the serpent in Genesis 3 had this ability; what it said made sin and disobedience to God seem attractive and appealing to the woman and she succumbed to the temptation. And we only need to look at the evil that resulted to understand how genuine is its capacity in this direction.

Peter Pett has said in his commentary, "It is almost as though in that tongue lies hidden the sinful world outside the church (the world of iniquity, or of the unrighteous, is the world of greed and covetous-

ness, of boasting and arrogance, of lust and dissension, of backbiting and gossip, and of envy and jealousy), only for it to be brought into the open when the tongue begins to speak, even within the assembly, through careless teachers. And by its words the tongue thus defiles the body of its owner by what it says, both because it reveals that it is sinful and because it arouses its owner to passion and lust and anger and folly as he exercises his tongue foolishly, and it defiles others by doing the same to them, (compare the phrase about the foul nature of malice in James 1:21), and it thus sets on fire the 'wheel of nature' which is within each one of us and among us all, setting it rolling on its uncontrolled way."

V. 6 teaches that its fire can be destructive to the entire "course of nature". "Course" is a word that means "wheel or circle" and much has been written to explore what James means. It may be that he is saying that it affects every aspect of one's life and penetrates every recess of his being. It may indicate that its effect will be prolonged and that its use will affect men for many years and in a wide area. Whatever its exact meaning, it's clear that the tongue has a much larger sphere of influence than its size would indicate and that if it isn't controlled by the Holy Spirit, it will be controlled by forces of evil that are linked with hell (Gehenna).

### **Inability of Control and Inconsistency of Use, vs. 7-12**

In v. 7, James teaches that wild animals are easier to tame than our tongues! All of those wild beasts that he lists in four groups have been subdued by man in some manner, but the taming of the tongue is a more difficult matter. Behind his teaching seems to be the suggestion that even as man can subdue those outside of himself, it requires someone outside of ourselves to truly subdue our tongues. It is only the Holy Spirit in His power and ability who can use God's Word to bring about a work that will control the tongue and use it for beneficial purposes. This is what we should seek for and submit to if we are to be profitable to others in our speech.

The poisonous potential of the tongue reminds us of God's assessment of mankind in Romans 3:13-14, "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." This quotation may be mainly from Psalm 140:3, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips." What

potential for evil lies in the improper use of our speech when James describes it as poison. We all know that, like the previous illustrations James has used, only a small amount of potent poison can result in serious illness or death. Only a small word can have the same effect, but it shouldn't be so.

How inconsistent we are in how we use our tongues! We may be gossiping about others one moment and then rise to offer praise to God the next. Or we can be criticizing fellow believers at one time and then try to speak to honor our humble Lord. Such inconsistencies in its use! Blessing and cursing from the same mouth, which is, as we have seen, directly connected to our heart. It seems so impossible, and we read that it is contrary even to nature, since a fountain is either known for its good, refreshing water or it is avoided because of its bitter water. In like manner, any tree will consistently bear the same kind of fruit and not a mixture of good and useless fruit, or fruit of one type as well as the fruit of another. We should aim for consistency in how we use our tongues. To seek to always use it for blessing, encouragement, edification, or benefit should always be our ambition. David prayed in Psalm 140:3, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Like David, we should pray for such control at all times so that unwise, careless, or cruel speech might not proceed from our lips.

(Continued)

*To be a professor of piety, and a practicer of iniquity is an abomination to the Lord.*

## **“ Behold My Servant”**

**- Isaiah 52:13**

**“He shall be exalted and extolled,  
and be very high”**

**O**ur Lord left the splendors of heaven to enter His groaning creation which had been subjected to total ruin because of Adam's sin. The hosts of angels must have marveled and been filled with wonder when the Creator, the Lord of glory left heaven and passed them on His journey to earth. The Hebrew writer re-

minds us "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:9).

Angels had visited earth on numerous occasions, but no angel had experienced natural birth, to be born as a man child is born, and to be held in the arms of an earthly mother. Angels wonder, saints worship and Paul writes, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Angels viewed the Son from heaven taking not on Him the nature of angels "but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). He was raised in lowly circumstances in the humble home of Mary and Joseph with brothers and sisters born after Him.

We will look at a few of the incidents in the sojourn of the Lord, the meek and humble servant as recorded by Mark. Perhaps a key to the Gospel of Mark is found in chapter ten and verse forty-five, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many".

One of the precious beauties of the Word of God is the person who God chooses to write about the perfect servant. The wondrous grace of God is clearly evident in the experience of Mark, a failing but restored servant. No doubt the heart of Mark was overflowing with worship as he wrote about the servant who never failed.

Mark's mother was evidently a godly sister who later opened her house as a place for the saints to pray (Acts 12:12). With a commendable mother and as the nephew of Barnabas (Col.4:10), he had a rich heritage. He was taken on the first missionary journey by Barnabas and Paul to help in the Lord's work. Mark was a young man with evident potential, and joined the two older servants as they preached in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 13:5). However we sadly read "John (Mark) departing from them returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13). To suggest a reason for his departure would only be conjecture but Paul felt that Mark had disqualified himself from further service.

It is most encouraging when God uses a failing servant to tell us about an unfailing servant, His beloved Son.

Mark doesn't refer to our Lord's birth. Nor is there a reference to shepherds, wise men or a star which guided them. Mark's readers read nothing about the lad of twelve sitting with the learned teachers in the temple. The genealogies which are so vitally important are recorded by Matthew and Luke but aren't found in Mark.

Mark briefly mentions the temptation in the wilderness and the Lord's baptism by John.

However, Mark must briefly refer to John the Baptist because this introduces the subject which the Holy Spirit guided him to record. John, unique in dress and food, would prepare the way for the flawless service of the Lord. Filled with the uniqueness and majesty of the Lord from heaven, John told his listeners, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7).

The Lord appears after John is put in prison. Mark now gets to his subject quickly and we see "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). Now the inspired pen of Mark describes to the reader the tireless, teaching, and healing ministry of the beloved servant of the Father. In this gospel the perfect servant is seen active in the work He was sent to do. No moment can be lost or wasted. Every opportunity of His very brief sojourn on earth must be redeemed.

Mark 1 reminds the reader how this perfect servant was immediately occupied with His Father's work by choosing His disciples (v. 16 to 20), rebuking an unclean spirit (v. 21 to 28), raising Peter's wife's mother from her bed of sickness, healing many of their disease (v. 32 to 34), preaching in the synagogues throughout all Galilee (v. 38 and 39), and healing a leper (v. 40 to 45).

A key word in this gospel record is "straightway" (eutheos, meaning "immediately"). The perfect servant redeems every moment of His brief sojourn here, Space prohibits us from mentioning every work recorded by Mark. The Gospel that Mark has given us is saturated by our Lord's mighty works and His precious words. The omnipotent power to the Servant's words and works are demonstrated as He moved graciously among men.

The Lord eventually made his way back to Nazareth, to His own country. On the Sabbath Day He began to teach in the synagogue. Astonishment filled the souls of the listeners. "From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands" (Mark 6:2). To the listeners he was just a laborer in Joseph's shop, the son of Mary. They knew his brothers. Just a carpenter, not a student who had learned at the feet of a Rabbi. Sadly "they were offended at Him" (Mark 6:3).

His hands were those that manifested rich compassion and love. His words were rich with grace and mercy.

For one who does not know this servant but may be reading these words consider carefully the

following. Another great purpose the Lord had as He moved on earth was to proclaim a message of salvation to the lost. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10).

Returning to Mark 1:40 to 45, we witness the servant at work in a marvelous way. A leper appears on the scene. This disease is vile, loathsome and morbid. Parts of the extremities of the body decay and drop off. There would be the smell of decaying flesh. The leper illustrates sin as it appears before God. In Bible days it was incurable unless there was Divine intervention. Compare Luke 15, which is an entire Gospel message that the Lord preached to those who were desperately lost. There He uses three illustrations: a lost sheep, a lost piece of silver and a lost son. The leper in Mark 1 illustrates a lost sinner.

Leprosy, today known as Hansen's Disease, illustrates sin and the great need of the sinner. The repulsive condition of the leper illustrates sin as it appears, so unacceptable to a holy God. In Ephesians 2:1 "dead in trespasses and sins" describes the helpless leper. The leper would be banished from his home and city. One has described the most mournful cry they have heard was the leper crying unclean. How needful for a sinner to be burdened with the uncleanness of their sin resulting in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The leper of Mark 1 came "beseeching". Kneeling at the feet of the Savior, there was no pride in this man's soul. In his helpless, desperate condition he cried "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Mark 1:40). The writer witnessed a young woman on her knees, elbows on a chair, realizing her desperate condition and that two Gospel preachers could not help her, desperately cry "O God save me". Heaven responds to the cry of a convicted sinner. Let those who proclaim the Gospel remember and preach repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The desperate cry of the leper touched the Savior. He was "moved with compassion" (Mark 1:41). The word compassion strongly indicates that the Lord "yearned over" the leper. What a blessed response He showed, for scripture records that our Lord "put forth His hand and touched him" (Mark 1:14). He could have met this man's need by speaking. But that touch did what the law could never do. No one had touched the leper for a long time. He must have immediately felt the gentle tenderness of that touch. The word "saith" (Mark 1:41) is a present participle suggesting that which goes simultaneously with the action of the leading verb "I will". This means the Lord said "I will" as He

touched him. Does the joy of that moment when He touched you still flood your soul with worship?

Today He is willing to save but sinners choose to linger in their sin. When the Lord said “I will, be thou clean” (Mark 1:41), one can hardly fathom the leper looking at his body and seeing that the dreadful disease was gone. Can everyone reading these words say “He touched me, My sins are gone, my fears are over and I shun God’s presence now no more”?

We have considered only a few of the precious references concerning the perfect servant which permeate the Gospel of Mark and which the Holy Spirit directed Mark to give us. Our Lord is declared by God to be the beloved Son when at His baptism there came a voice from heaven declaring “Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

On the mount of transfiguration a cloud overshadowed those on the mountain: and a voice was heard crying out of the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son: hear Him” (Mark 9:7). The word “beloved”(agapetos) is the adjective of the verb agapao. The emphasis is on the preciousness of the one loved. It is the present imperative of continuous action. From eternity to every moment of earth’s journey, this is the blessed one of whom the Father could say “I am well pleased.”

Hatred and jealousy lurks in the being of mortal men. This kind, loving, merciful, compassionate servant of God came unto His own, and they rejected Him (John 1:11). As they listened to Him in the synagogue they were filled with wrath (Luke 4:28). They thrust Him out of the city with the intention of casting Him over the brow of a hill (Luke 4:29). “But He passing through the midst of them went His way,” (Luke 4:30). It seems as if their hands were frozen in the air as He passed majestically through the midst of them.

Then, they took up stones to stone Him (John 10:31).

Then and presently: “Our Lord is now rejected and by the world disowned.”

**There were nuggets of gold in Moses that would never have been found had he remained in Pharaoh's palace. It took forty years of roughing to bring them to the Surface.**

**If you are tempted to lose patience with your fellow man, stop and think how patient God has been with you.**

## **Fruit of the Spirit, pt. 3**

*Robert Surgenor*

(Concluding article on this important subject)

The fruit of the Spirit is

### **3 – Peace**

The third characteristic of the fruit is “peace.” The believer has a tranquility of mind. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The dread of God is gone. There is now a family relationship enjoyed. God becomes our Father. We have an inner peace because of our new relationship with God.

### **4 – Longsuffering**

Coming to the second group of three we find our relationship and behavior to our fellow man.

“Longsuffering” carries the thought of being patient with others. This is an attribute of God. “The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20). In Peter’s day it could be said; “The Lord ...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The psalmist exclaimed; “But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:15).

Long-suffering is the supernatural ability to endure troubles, and yet still stay in love, be full of joy, and at perfect rest, while you are struggling through the fiercest of storms! As W. E. Vine quotes, “Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish, it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy, 1 Peter 3:20. Patience is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it is the opposite of despondency, and is associated with hope, 1 Thess, 1:3.” In defining “longsuffering,” the following words are used, “forbearance, patience, self-restraint, not hastily retaliate or promptly punish, opposite of anger, does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under pressure, long tempered.”

Christians are encouraged to manifest this fruit. Ephesians 4:2 states, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” Colossians 1:11 says, “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” In Colossians 3:12 we read, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness,

humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.” This can only be accomplished through an ungrieved Spirit being allowed to control our lives. A lack of longsuffering is shown when we have a short fuse that causes us to say and do things in retaliation to others. This sad trait was never seen in Christ, nor should it be seen in us.

There is the danger with some mature saints to be impatient toward those who are less mature. Even though it has taken a grown saint years to come to their present level of knowledge, yet some often are not willing to give the immature the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding. This manifestly is unfair, and lacking in longsuffering. Be slow to condemn, but quick to comfort and counsel.

Paul said to Timothy, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience” (2 Timothy 3:10). Paul was an individual who abundantly gave what he received. The longsuffering Christ had shown him (1 Timothy 1:16) was appreciated and thoroughly manifested throughout his own life. He endured the harshest kinds of persecution, but never gave up or gave in. May we take to heart his words, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

## 5 – Gentleness

The fifth quality is “gentleness,” meaning, “mild, soft, meek” Gentleness or meekness describes a calm disposition, particularly under fire, which actually requires a great deal of strength. Spiritual meekness is not weakness, but strength under control. The Lord was “meek and lowly,” but certainly not weak. Our nation is full of people that are anything but meek. You can find them all over the country, marching with placards demanding their rights, destroying property, and sneering at police officers. They consider no one except themselves. Many of them call good evil and proclaim evil to be good. If Job were alive today he probably would say about them; “Whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock” (Job 30:1).

If we want to win sinners, we must manifest gentleness and kindness. If we want to regain a fallen brother, we must first be kind. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). Kindness manifests our compassion, and consideration toward them. It proves that our sincerity is real. Trust comes to those who first are kind in their deal-

ings with others. A lack of the Spirit’s fruit makes one unsuccessful in their teaching and example to others.

W. E. Vine has a nice thought on this. “The meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was “meek” because He had the infinite resources of God at His command. The believer is to cultivate meekness for the same reason. Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is an equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simple because it is not occupied with self.

## 6 – Goodness

Next we find “goodness.” The thought is “doing good to others.” A generous heart is not often seen in this selfish, self-centered world, but when it is, how refreshing it is to behold. Benevolence is often connected with “goodness” in the scriptures.

Galatians 6:10 – “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

1 Timothy 6:18 – “That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”

Hebrews 13:16 – “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

One of the first times we see this fruit after the Church was born is in Acts 4:37. Barnabas “having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” His substance was given to help supply the needs of others not as wealthy as he. “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). The shutting up of one’s compassions is the opposite to goodness.

The word “communicate” is translated “contribution” in “Romans 15:26. “For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.”

The Churches of Macedonia manifested the fruit of goodness in a remarkable way. Luke bears testimony, writing; “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much entreaty

that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:1–5).

These were spiritually healthy Christians, manifesting the fruit (joy and goodness) of the Spirit. Their action was unnatural. It is a paradox. Instead of their great trial of affliction producing grief and sorrow, it created joy. Their trial had met the test, and this is what God considered more precious than gold "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7).

Then we see that in spite of their deep poverty, they were rich in giving their substance to others. I remember a man with a large family, at a conference giving a sizable gift to the late William Warke. Mr. Warke said to him, "You can't afford to give me this," to which the man replied, "I can't afford not to give this to you." This man's eyes were set on the future. He was laying up for himself treasure in heaven, thus the fruit of the Spirit was seen.

## 7 – Faith

Coming to the last three qualities of the Spirit's fruit we see, "faith, meekness, temperance."

"Faith," can be interpreted two ways. (1) Trusting God, as W. E. Vine puts it, "trustfulness of the habit of mind which does not doubt that God is working all things together for good with those who love Him, Romans 8:28; or (2) "Faithfulness," meaning loyalty, fidelity. A person faithful to God in their behavior. One who can be trusted, who is faithful in all their ways. I prefer the second interpretation, for fruit is something visible to others and a Christian's faithfulness can more readily be seen in his behavior rather than his quiet faith in God. Also, the context would bare this out. In many of the Galatians there was a lack of loyalty to Paul (4:16), thus mentioning this virtue would be in order. A lack of faithfulness to the gospel is also evidenced in the Galatian saints (1:6-9; 3:1; 5:7). Thus, I conclude that faithfulness to God and to His will is the virtue, the fruit, that Paul is referring to here. Fruitful saints are true to His word, faithful to the assembly, and trustworthy to all around them, whether saint or sinner. No danger of discomfort will keep them from obeying the scriptures. No little excuse will keep them from the assembly's meetings, and their word is always good as gold.

## 8 – Meekness

Next comes "meekness." People that take offense easily, lack meekness. There's an old saying, "They wear their feelings on their cuff." They are touchy, which usually is associated with pride. The greatest example of meekness is the Lord Jesus, who was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Women are prone to wearing jewelry. Instead, God gives sisters a better ornament, "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:4). The reason this ornament is so costly is because it is rare.

"The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach his way" (Psalm 25:9). "To this man will I look (pay attention to), even to him that is poor (humble) and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

A meek spirit has its rewards. First – God does not guide and teach proud scholars, but He does humble saints. "He who hath no sense of his ignorance, can have no desire, or capability of knowledge, human or divine" (George Horne). God guides the meek to walk judiciously, to behave themselves wisely. He also will teach them His word, which is a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. Second – God gives him special attention.

## 9 – Temperance

The last characteristic of the Spirit's fruit is "temperance." The mastery of all our appetites and passions. The meaning of the word in the original is, "the power to keep himself in check." The Spirit gives the saint the ability to have the mastery over his own body, minds, and thoughts. Paul writes; "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians (9:27).

Illicit sexual desires can attack the body, but temperance is a shield from such fiery darts. To the ex-drunkard, a desire to consume alcohol will be quenched by temperance. The fruit of temperance preserves a person from losing their temper, retaliating, behaving indiscreetly, and even from overeating. It will even regulate his spending. Going deeply into debt manifests a lack of temperance. Adorning one's body in a fleshly manner announces the lack of temperance.

The subject is vast and the pages of this little booklet are full, so we draw our few, simple and searching thoughts to a close. May the Lord, the Spirit help us to manifest temperance, which enables a believer, while walking and living in the world, to keep his garments unspotted from the world. Yea, may we

manifest all nine qualities of the Spirit' fruit, so that when the world looks upon us, they may see Jesus.

The first lesson in Christ's school is self-denial.

## Twentieth Century Jethro

*H. P. Barker*

**A**nd Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people...and came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness....then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land (Exodus 18:1,5,27).

In almost every city and village throughout Christendom there are to be found twentieth century Jethros. Speaking of them after the manner of men, they are generally excellent folks, courteous, liberal, of good repute among their neighbors, well disposed towards all. There is much to be said in their favor. But they are Jethros. Let me explain what I mean.

1. Jethro was sincerely glad to hear of a good work going on among other people (Exodus 18:9). Moses told him the story of God's gracious dealings with the people of Israel; how He had delivered them from the cruel bondage of Egypt, and had marvelously provided for their need in the wilderness. "And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel."

2. Jethro could give very wise counsel as to how God's work should be done (Exodus 18:19). He saw that Moses was bearing too heavy a burden, and suggested to him that he should share it with others. Able, God-fearing, truth-loving men were to be selected, who should share the judicial responsibilities of the great lawgiver, and relieve him of all concern as to the minor matters that might call for a decision.

3. Jethro was kind and hospitable to his relatives (18:6). Jethro kindly took charge of Zipporah and her two sons under his hospitable roof while Moses was away in Egypt, seeking the deliverance of Israel.

While all this was true of Jethro, it was also true that he refrained from fully identifying himself with the people of God. He took no part in their conflicts with their enemies, nor in their wilderness exercises. He acknowledged the greatness and supremacy of the true God (18:11), but never rose to the height of His

glorious purpose for the people of His choice. His action spoke loudly enough that he had no desire to be a participator with them in the prospect God set before them. "He went his way into his own land"(18:27).

It is to be feared that there are many today who bear a striking resemblance to Jethro. In spite of their many excellent qualities, they fail to rise to the height of God's purpose for His people. They apprehend but feebly the nature of the calling wherewith they are called. Their appreciation of the heavenly relationships in which Christians are set is small indeed, and they give a very secondary place to the wonderful portion that belongs to the Church, the body and bride of Christ. They may rejoice to hear of the prosperity of the Lord's work in their own locality, or in regions beyond the seas, but when one speaks to them of God's wonderful purpose for us, and of our heavenly calling, there is little response. They are not practically "strangers and pilgrims" on earth. They do not throw themselves wholeheartedly into the wilderness conflicts which are the experience of those who seek to appropriate, in the energy of the Spirit of God, the heavenly portion of the Church. As a result, they know little of that priceless treasure of the reproach of Christ which, in Moses' reckoning, was "greater riches" than all the wealth of Egypt (Hebrews 11:26).

Do you lay it to heart that the calling of the people of God is a heavenly one, and that we are not left in the world for a while in order to throw ourselves into the current of its ambitions and pursuits (even with the best of motives), but that we may be altogether apart from it in spirit, while serving the interests of Christ as His ambassadors in it? Carry this question into the presence of God, and seek grace from Him to keep you from being a Twentieth Century Jethro.

### Worldliness

Worldliness is difficult to define, or inaccurately defined. We are disposed to make worldliness begin at a point or two above where we are ourselves. The definition from God's Word is, that which is not of the Father (1 John 2:15-17). Hence, the deeper my fellowship with the Father, the keener will be my sense of what is worldly. You can hardly attempt to define worldliness; it shades off gradually from white to jet black. You cannot place a bound and say, "Here is where world line begins." Walk with God, and you will not walk with the world. Cold distinctions and rigid rules will avail nothing. The 3-days journey will separate us from the world.