

James 26-08-26b

We resume our study in James chapter two, and notice how practical this is. I have emphasized in almost every lesson the beautiful weaving together and tight construction of this letter. It was delivered with care, with thought.

It is designed very purposefully. Notice back in chapter two, verse one, my brethren do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality. He doesn't say that they don't have faith.

He doesn't say that they are not faithful. He says, you've got this faith, and you're holding this faith, but don't have the faith with an attitude that betrays that faith and prevents the natural expression of that faith in your words and in your actions. You've got the faith of the Lord Jesus, but don't hold it with subjectivity.

That's really what we're talking about here. You remember the definition of subjectivity versus objectivity. Subjectivity has three basic directions, eyes on self, eyes on people, or eyes on circumstances.

I get self-interested. I am pursuing self-gratification, self-advancement, self-glorification. It's the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I, which is almost as bad as the first and second beast and Satan himself in Revelation.

We can get self-centered. It's subjectivity. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

It fools us. We think that we are being beneficial to others and we're actually serving ourselves. Subjectivity, eyes on self, eyes on other people.

This is James's subject in this section. You see somebody and you see somebody else and you are partial. You treat one one way and one a different way on a false basis.

It is a bad evaluation. These could be rich people that are exploiting you. This could be a poor person that has come seeking and in need and you are to be God's avenue of blessing for them.

This requires discernment. Not every rich person is evil. Not every poor person is deserving, but you can't use superficial judgments.

This is subjective evaluation. Objectivity means we understand how love works. We know the spears of love.

Does this person qualify in the one another category? Are they a neighbor that I am to love as myself? Golden rule, do unto others as I would have others do unto me. These are the others that are in the neighbor periphery. There are those who are outside.

As much as it is up to us, live peaceably with all men. Work quietly with our hands. Be non-confrontational.

Live and let live. Don't give offense. Don't cause conflicts.

Don't go get in people's business. Beyond the one another sphere or the neighbor sphere, there is the outside world. And this conditions a lot of things for us in this day in terms of social media.

Are you gonna get in somebody's business who isn't really in your periphery? Are you gonna have wars and fights on Christian websites, which I have seen happen and had to quit going to them because there was abusive, destructive, arrogant, insensitivity that was very unchristian? I'll just opt out. And then enemies, the outside realm where somebody is an enemy and you can have an enemy in any one of the other spheres. Someone in your one another sphere can turn into an enemy and it changes how we treat them.

Somebody that is a neighbor can turn into an enemy. Somebody who's just outside can suddenly be an enemy for apparent reasons that make sense to them and may not make sense to us. So love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you. There is a qualification in any of the other spheres if they suddenly have ought against us. We drop our offering on the way to worship God and try to be reconciled, try to take somebody out of the enemy camp.

Do good to them if they hate us, pray for them if they spitefully use us. And in doing so, coals of fire are heaped on their head and they may not respond to the coals of fire, but that's not my problem. I've done what I'm supposed to do.

So James starts with after chapter one, do not hold your faith, which he doesn't question or challenge, but don't have that faith and then start mistreating people. And it starts with attitudes of the heart. I'm going to recognize one face and favor it.

I'm going to discriminate against another face because it's dressed in shabby clothes, filthy clothes. I've got to lay aside filthiness and the overflow of wickedness myself. That includes the sort of hypocrisy that says this person is filthy.

I'm gonna set them in a corner and at my feet and out of the way when I myself am practicing a spiritual form of filthiness that God says to set aside. I've got to tend to my own heart. We saw in the first session, the passages that connect speaking to the heart.

There is an attitude in the heart and out of the heart overflows that attitude into speech, into speaking, laleo. And when we are speaking, we will say certain things. For example, 1 Corinthians 12, verse three, Paul says, therefore, I inform you that no one who is speaking by the

Spirit of God, laleo.

In an ongoing process, the Holy Spirit is engaged in this person's communication. I tell you, no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, laleo, Jesus be cursed. And no one can laleo, no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

This is their ongoing expression. It's not, can they speak the words? What is their ongoing verbal expression? No one speaking by the Spirit of God, habitually filled with the Spirit, communicating with others, they're not going to say Jesus be cursed. You can tell by what someone says what is in their heart.

And no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. So both verbs are used there, and it's a good illustration, 1 Corinthians 12, three, of the difference between the two. So back to our passage, James says partiality, and then he gives an example.

If someone coming into the synagogue, into the gathering together, and you discriminate on a false basis. Now there is genuine basis for discrimination, and we have to balance what James says here with what we know from other passages. For example, Romans 16, 17.

Now I urge you brothers to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Turn away from them. James is not saying accept anybody and everybody indiscriminately.

He's saying don't discriminate on a faulty basis, i.e. their economic status, their hygiene level, their acceptability in social terms, what they can do for you or not do for you. That's a false basis. There are legitimate basis.

One of them is Romans 16, 17. Paul urges us, watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. If somebody keeps making an issue, turn away from them.

Philippians 3, 17. Join one another in following my example, brothers, Paul says, and carefully observe those who live according to the pattern we set for you. You have to discern who is living according to the pattern, who is conformed to the teaching you have learned and who is not.

This is observational. This is discernment. This is becoming aware by observation of who is faithful and obedient and who isn't.

We are commanded to do this, not to ignore it. So follow my example, Paul says. Carefully observe those who live according to the pattern we set for you.

You have to know the pattern and then you can observe whether someone is conformed to it or not. 2 Thessalonians 3, 14 and 15. Take note of anyone who does not obey the instructions we have given in this letter.

Do not associate with him so that he may be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3, 14 and 15. Take note of anyone who does not obey these instructions.

Don't associate with them. So we are enjoined to discern. And if we are going to have a policy towards someone, it needs to be on a biblical basis, not subjectivity.

That's how chapter two began. And remember when James said we should be quick to hear and slow to speak in the preceding chapter? Let everyone be quick to hear and slow to speak. That was chapter one, verse 19.

So in verse five of chapter two, he says, when you pay attention and you say, sit in this good place and you say to the poor man, you stand there, have you not shown partiality? Have you not shown this undue respect of the face? And then in verse five, he says, listen, my beloved brethren, stop speaking, be slow to speak, be quick to hear. Listen to this. God has chosen the poor of this world.

God didn't discriminate against the poor. It's a wrong conclusion to draw that if someone is poor, God doesn't want to bless them. It isn't exclusively the poor, it isn't only the poor, but God has chosen the poor just as much as anybody else.

God does not discriminate on the basis of economic status, meaning you can't draw the conclusion God's got it in for them. That's why their crops failed or their money evaporated or they came upon hard times. God has chosen the poor of this world, along with anyone else who has faith and is obedient, to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him.

Anyone can love God, regardless of their circumstance. You've dishonored the poor man. There are rich who oppress you and so on.

So verse 14 is where we are now. What does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him? This is the someone that James is gonna be talking to in verse 16. Someone says he has faith.

So then in verse 17, verse 16, I'm sorry, one of you says, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, does not give them the things which are needed. They have faith, but they're not willing to do anything. And so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

This is dead in the sense of fruitless, fruitless. Someone will say in verse 18, this same someone who said he has faith in verse 14, he says, some one of you will say you have faith. You say you have faith and I have works.

Show me your faith without your works, I will show you my faith by my works. And in the best text, your and my aren't there. Show me your faith without works, I will show you my faith by works.

That's the better text. I think that's what James originally wrote. You believe that there is one God.

Here's an example of your faith. It's consistent all the way through 14 through 20. Same person is talking.

You believe there's one God. You do well, even the demons believe and tremble, but do you wanna know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Do you wanna see it worked out? Verse 21, was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works? And by works, faith was made complete, was made perfect. Remember we talked earlier about that which is perfect, the telios that comes to maturity.

When lust is conceived, it brings forth sin and sin. When it comes to maturity, telios, that was an earlier study. This is another example of that.

By his works, his faith came to maturity, was fleshed out, came to fullness, achieved its goal. Verse 23, the scripture was fulfilled, which says Abraham believed God, faith, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God.

You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. We run the risk of fooling ourselves because we understand a lot of great things in the word of God. We've seen together a lot of wonderful truths, a lot of revelations, a lot of insights, a lot of beautiful attributes of God, promises of God, principles and doctrines.

It's beautiful. We appreciate it. We believe it.

We are gratified by it. We're comforted and encouraged by it. But do we live in its light? Does it change our heart? Romans 12, two, if we're not gonna be conformed to the world, we have to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

The word of God has to get into our hearts, dividing in the sunder the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow, and is a critic, a discerner, a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It's one thing to believe the word. It is something else to let it be the fire and the hammer that God designed it to be, to break the rocks in our thinking, to burn away the wood, hay and stubble, and cause us to live in its light.

If the change takes place in the heart, where's the first thing we're going to see it? Attitudes will change. I'm no longer going to be subjective. I'm not going to be looking at people in terms of what they can do for me or what I don't feel I need to do for them.

On a faulty basis, I will use what I've learned from the word of God. I still have standards. I still have limits.

I still have policies based on the word of God. There are things I do in the one another sphere

that I don't do in the neighbor sphere or the outsider sphere or the enemy sphere. I have learned this from the word of God.

I believe it and I practice it. If scripture says don't discriminate and sort people into groups based on faulty criteria, sort and discriminate based on biblical criteria. Is someone walking according to the pattern? Does someone say Jesus is Lord or do they say Jesus is a waste of time? Jesus is cursed.

Nobody has the Holy Spirit that doesn't care about the Lord Jesus. Thinks at best he was a teacher of morality or something. And they're not even sure he really existed in history.

But if he did, he was just a guy. People misconstrued him. They made him into Lord later.

And you have former evangelicals who write books and whose names are known around the world who basically say Jesus is cursed. And they're not doing that in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are looking for those who operate in the Spirit.

We want to be operating in the Spirit. That gives us objectivity, God's viewpoint. We have to cultivate that and we have to practice it.

It has practical effects on attitudes we have toward other people. We start with the attitude. That will then affect what we say.

The overflow of the heart comes out of the mouth. And we will say to people, go be warmed, be fed, and not do anything for them if we've got a bad attitude in the heart. If we have a good attitude, we are going to follow the Lord's instructions to be treating others as we would like to be treated.

As those who recognize that there are people who do not work and should not eat. And there are others who are genuinely needy, widows and orphans, that we can care for. And God can use us to be a part of their provision and a part of their comfort and encouragement.

In the sphere of the Holy Spirit, all of these things work together. It starts in our heart where the Holy Spirit is. This enables God through the Holy Spirit to set a watch on our mouth and keep the door of our lips so that our speech is healthy, seasoned with salt, apples of gold, pictures of silver.

We bridle our tongue, and we only say things that are helpful and necessary. Bridle the tongue, you get their whole body in subjection. We'll see that.

So you see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. Verse 25, a second illustration. Likewise was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

I will show you my faith in what I do. We have to know what we're doing. We have to observe and judge what we are doing.

If we would judge ourselves, we will not be judged. And if I catch myself being different around some people because I think they can do me some good, or I am dismissive of people because I don't think they're important and it's a faulty basis, there is gonna be judgment without mercy on me because I am not being properly merciful. Mercy has limits.

God doesn't express his mercy to the entire world. He's made it available to the world, but there are conditions. We have to know those conditions and follow them ourselves.

Well, that brings us to chapter three. Notice the flow here. We first look to ourselves.

We are in trouble. We ask for wisdom. And when that wisdom comes, we've got to live in its light.

It should affect how we look at other people. It should affect how we talk. And it should affect how we act.

That's the flow through chapter one and chapter two. Now we're at chapter three. My brothers, let not many of you become teachers knowing that we shall receive stricter judgment.

Anybody that decides they're going to instruct others, and this doesn't have to just be pastors or Sunday school teachers, or those who go into some sort of formal Christian teaching ministry. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers. We can decide that we are going to be influencers, that we're going to push the word of God out toward those who aren't looking for it, aren't ready for it, won't appreciate it.

You end up in the pearls before swine category. We have to be careful about deciding, oh, I just heard a good truth. A person I know really needs to hear this.

I'm going to go teach them what I just heard in Bible class, or what I just read in my Bible, or what I just saw in my devotional book, or an article, or what I heard on the radio. I'm going to go teach someone else. We have to be really careful, not just in sort of the formal teaching assignment, because notice this is optional.

When God assigns a gift to a pastor, there's not personal choice involved, other than disobedience. God chose Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt, and Moses had a choice of whether or not to be obedient, but he would be in big trouble because he's the assigned guy. When you have a spiritual gift, you have the opportunity to exercise it or not, but you don't get to pick the gift.

I am sure that if there had been a choice on the table, I would have picked something else. It wasn't a choice, but notice what it says here. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers.

You don't decide that you're going to be a teacher. That's the gist of this. If God decides you're going to be a teacher, you had better be obedient to your calling.

If God decides you have the gift of helps or of encouragement or of prayer or of comfort or of any one of another in the long lists of gifts that we have, especially in Paul's letters, if you have that assignment, it's not a choice. God has assigned you that place in the body. That's what you do.

But here it says, let not many of you become, meaning you're deciding that you're going to teach. Be careful because we teachers, James knows he got the assignment. Jesus called his name.

The Holy Spirit inspired him to write this letter. He doesn't have a choice. And most of us, when we get an assignment from God, we're grateful and we just want to do the very best we can in God's grace, by his strength, for his purpose, to his glory, what a privilege.

But not just any old body can say, you know what? I think I'm going to go do this or do that or do the other. Let not many of you become, knowing teachers receive a stricter judgment. If you need some motivation to not go into teaching mode, if you decide you're a teacher, teachers are held to a higher standard.

There is double discipline. If you mess up teaching, the discipline is compounded. Notice verse two, for we all stumble in many things.

Teaching is a verbal activity. We are back to the heart. The overflow of the heart is the speech.

Speech precedes action and is often a part of how we treat others. And that goes right back around to the heart. Bridle the tongue.

If you can bridle the tongue, you've already got your heart in place and your whole body will be in subjection. Meaning your work is going to be good and acceptable at the judgment. So, we all stumble in many things.

If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a mature man, not perfect. It says perfect, doesn't mean perfect. This is to Tolas.

How many times have we seen this word woven in and out like a connected thread through chapter one and chapter two and into chapter three? Let patience have its perfecting work, its maturing work that you may be perfect, mature and complete, lacking nothing. Patience, chapter one, same idea here. If anyone does not stumble in word, let's say we wanna be those people.

Tomorrow, gonna be interacting with people somewhere, sometime, somehow, going to be having a conversation. It's amazing to me. Have you ever just sat in a public place, Walmart, airport, waiting room, where you can see a lot of people? We talk constantly.

People talk, there are so many words expended. I think global warming is from humans talking.

We just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk all the time.

And you think of all the conversations that I've had just during my lifetime. In the last 65 or 70 years, all of the conversations, how much of it actually mattered? Made a difference. We just talk to be talking.

If we learn to be chaste and conservative, focused and purposeful in our talking, not just talking to hear our own voice and not stumble in word. To not stumble in word, I've got to have my heart right. Because my words are coming out of my heart.

If I'm not going to stumble, then my heart can't stumble. This is back to attitudes. Notice the observation of the face was an attitude of the heart that came out in sit here or stand there.

He's back to his theme of bridling the tongue back in chapter one, verse 26. If you think you're religious, but you don't bridle your tongue, but deceive your heart, this one's religion is useless. We all stumble in many things.

Three, two of James. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a mature man, able also to bridle the whole body. You get your heart right, your speech will be right, and your works that your faith is going to sponsor.

The exhibition of your faith in what you do is going to be disciplined, is going to be effective, is going to be proper and acceptable in God's sight. Indeed, and you can see a text note there that says that it says now if, but it doesn't really matter. We put bits in horses mouths so that they obey us and we turn their whole body.

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. James was in a boat on Sea of Galilee. Those boats had rudders.

He was in fierce winds with the Lord Jesus. He knows all about boats. He's a fisherman.

They're large, driven by fierce winds. They're turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member that boasts great things.

See how great a forest, a little fire kindles. You get fires in several places in the country right now, several of them set by individuals. And as the old devotional song around the campfire used to say, it only takes a spark to get a fire burning.

You want to pass it on. I think that's the name of the song. Look how great a fire.

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. Now we use our tongues to pray, to bless one another. This goes back to the way that Proverbs work.

Remember how early James is. This is an Old Testament mode of communication. And it isn't

every poor person that is deserving of consideration.

It's not every rich man who is evil. We pointed out the scriptural examples of those who benefited the Lord Jesus due to their wealth. But this is aphoristic.

This is a principle. The tongue can be, and often is, just as train up a child in the way that he should go. And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

It's not a promise. It is a proverb. This is a general truth for which there can be exceptions.

This is a general truth for which there are exceptions. If the tongue was always a flame lit on fire by hell, we would just become mute and be like those monks that never say a word. We understand this.

The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles. So be careful.

It doesn't mean don't ever have a little fire because you're gonna light a forest on fire. It is an exhortation to be extremely careful. We don't cut out our tongue.

We bridle it. We bring our tongue into subjection by bringing our heart into subjection. And that enables us to bring everything into subjection under the law of liberty.

The tongue is a fire, verse six. A world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature.

And it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. Notice again, this is proverbial.

These are general truths. Our president is fond of making broad claims and people delight in saying, well, that's not true, here's an exception. They don't understand the way New Yorkers talk and exaggerate and hyperbolize.

And same thing is true in scripture. There are times when we are speaking in broad strokes and there are generalities that in the context communicate absolute divine truth. And that's what's going on here.

If somebody says, well, wait a minute, there's a kind of sea creature that's never been tamed by man. You're missing the point. It's an illustration.

In broad strokes, every kind of beast and bird, every kind of reptile and creature of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. What does it mean to be tamed? We can catch them. We can net them.

We can put them in fences. We can control them in some way, shape or form. We can limit their

movements.

We can avoid their predations and so on. It doesn't mean tamed in the sense that you can put a saddle on them and ride them. But no man can tame the tongue.

It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison, potentially. The Lord Jesus spoke with a human tongue. The apostle Paul, the other apostles spoke with a tongue.

Paul says, if I speak with the tongues of men and angels, it depends on whether or not I have love as to whether it is effective. You remember this in the love chapter. I can speak with the tongues of men and angels.

What determines whether it's beneficial speech, whether love is present or not? So by the same token, the untamed tongue is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. And we by ourselves do not have the power to tame our tongue. This is where we go to scripture.

What do you say in the power of the Holy Spirit? And what do you say when the spirit is absent? Absent God's spirit, nobody can control the tongue. We have to have divine enablement for that. So otherwise it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.

So how careful should we be? We think, oh, it's only words. There's a great Bee Gees tune. It's only words, but words are all I have to take your heart away.

Words mean things. Terminology, look around in society and politics and culture today. Words matter, words mean things.

And violence can be incited by what people say and how they say it. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. Knowing this, we run to the power of God.

We embrace the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the light and the strength that comes from God's word. Living and powerful, sharper than a sword, works on our hearts so that we can bridle our tongues, so that we can condition our actions toward others before God. And when we are judged by the law of liberty, we are acceptable in God's sight.

Be diligent to show yourself approved unto God, not needing to be ashamed as a workman because we're looking at the word of truth. The word of truth gives us the power in the hands of the Holy Spirit, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, to avoid what would otherwise be true. We've got to redeem the time because the days are evil.

But if we redeem the time, the day is not evil. So, unruly evil full of deadly poison. With it, we bless our God and Father, and with it, we curse men who have been made in the similitude of God.

We'll have more to say about this next time. Out of the same mouth, proceed blessing and

cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

So, what is our challenge in the hours and days ahead? Let's pay attention to our conversation. In the old King James conversation, it meant lifestyle. You go to the King James of Ephesians, and it talks about, let our conversation be, and it's talking about our lifestyle.

But this matters. We can either be agents of disruption and cursing and poison and evil because we are intemperate, or we can cultivate presence and power of the Holy Spirit, keep short accounts, confess our sins, walk in the light, let the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and be guarded, bridle our tongue. It's easiest to do when we have already curated our attitudes and remembered in humility our need for wisdom that we request from God.

And we take that wisdom on board and we apply it, nothing doubting. Doesn't matter if the boss is gonna be offended. It doesn't matter if I'm not gonna be in the in crowd.

I live my life to please God the Father and not people. And I don't discriminate against someone because they happen to offend some other standard in the world. Our standards come from the word of God.

Our motivation comes from the Holy Spirit, from love, from hope, and an expression of our faith. Much more to say about this in James, but how practical is this? How convicting is it that we've got to work on ourselves, James chapter one, so that we can treat others well, James chapter two, in our conversation, in our attitudes, and in our actions. Wonderfully practical book.

We'll have more to see next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you that even though the Lord Jesus has left this earth and is seated in your presence at your right hand, we have this powerful guidance. We have wonderful enablement from your Holy Spirit and light on our path to hide in our hearts so that we don't sin, to change our hearts, to renew them so that we can think, speak, and act in a way that furthers your objectives and accomplishes your purposes on this earth and qualifies us for blessing and inheritance now and in the ages to come.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths that the Holy Spirit will help us to see the specific situations, the specific relationships, opportunities, and challenges where they apply so that we can truly put them into practice and not be those who look at the law of liberty, walk away, and forget what we saw. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.