

“The Peril and Privilege of Spiritual Gifts - Control of Giftedness”

INTRO

As we begin the year 2009 we come to the 3rd chapter of James and our 9th lesson in this book on SPIRITUAL MATURITY. Let's review.

Chapter 1: SPIRITUAL MATURITY brings CONFIDENCE IN TURMOIL

Specifically: In trials of life, in financial ups and downs, in temptations from the enemy, in reactions to difficult situations and in our pursuit of living out “pure religion”

Chapter 2: SPIRITUAL MATURITY brings CONVICTION IN ACTION

Specifically: in the way we treat others with equality (no favoritism) and in the acting out of our faith in works that demonstrate our faith (“faith without works is dead”)

Now we come to . . .

Chapter 3: SPIRITUAL MATURITY brings CONTROL OF WORD AND BEHAVIOR

1. Control of Giftedness (v. 1, 2)
2. Control of Tongue (v. 3-12)
3. Control of Wisdom (v. 13-18)

OUR TEXT: JAMES 3: 1-2

- 1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.
- 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

When I speak of “control of giftedness” I refer to . . .

- A. The teaching (of God's Word) is a “gift” – a spiritual gift from God.
- B. Like all gifts from God, it must be used carefully and in “control”; with . . .
 1. **accountability** (“stricter judgment”)
 2. **humility** (“we all stumble”)
 3. **reality** (we cannot keep from stumbling)

Regarding spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12)

1. God wants us to be aware (12:1)
2. There are a variety of gifts given by the one Holy Spirit (12:4)
3. There are a variety of ways to use the gift, all by the one Holy Spirit (12:5,6)
4. Each believer is given at least one gift for the common good of the body (12:7)
5. The Spirit gifts each believer as He wills (12:11)

Categories of gifts

1. 1 Corinthians 12: 8-10 lists a number of the gifts, as does Romans 12:7-8
I believe these should not be seen as a complete listing, but as examples.
2. There appear to be 3 primary “categories” or kinds of gifts mentioned
 - a. **“Sign” gifts** – such as tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healings
Many believe these are gifts given especially to the apostles to confirm their credentials. Others believe these gifts are still for today. James is not speaking of this category of gifts.
 - b. **“Speaking” gifts** – such as prophesy (preaching), teaching, encouraging (exhortation), wisdom and knowledge. James refers specifically to “teaching” in James 3:1.
 - c. **“Serving” gifts** (mentioned specifically in Romans 12:7,8) such as serving, giving, leading, showing mercy, etc.
3. 1 Peter 4: 10, 11 refers specifically to these latter two categories (possibly implying the passing away of the category of “sign” gifts)
1 Peter 4: 10, 11 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

REASONS FOR CAUTION IN TEACHING THE BIBLE (and in the use of all spiritual gifts)

1. (implied) **Teaching is a spiritual gift, given by God**

1 Corinthians 12:29 “...All are not teachers, are they?”

Ephesians 4:11-12a “And he [Jesus] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints . . .”

Yet all believers should be able to teach

2 Timothy 2:24 “the Lord’s bond-servant must . . . be able to teach”

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another . . .”

2. **Teachers incur a stricter Divine judgment (v.1) ACCOUNTABILITY**

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to

what he has done, whether good or bad.

1 Corinthians 3: 12-15 *Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

TEACHERS WIELD INCREDIBLE POWER. A teacher can be a "Billy Graham" or a "Jim Jones"

3. Teachers are sinners who stumble themselves (v.2a) HUMILITY

Luke 6:39 *And He [Jesus] also spoke a parable to them: " A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?"*

Proverbs 27

v. 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

v. 19 As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.

v. 21 The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and each is tested by the praise accorded him.

TEACHERS LEAVE THEMSELVES OPEN TO GREATER SCRUTINY

4. Teachers by their many words invite sin of the tongue (v.2b) REALITY

Proverbs 21: 23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.*

Proverbs 10:19 *When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*

TEACHERS LEAVE THEMSELVES OPEN TO GREATER TEMPTATION (pride!)

Rich Warren, in his best-selling book "The Purpose Driven Life" is right on target (in my opinion) in helping us to understand the process by which we can determine God's call of giftedness on our life. He uses the anachronism of S. H. A. P. E.

S - Spiritual Giftedness - how has God spiritually gifted you?

H - Heart - what kind of service do you like to do?

A - Ability – what are your natural abilities regarding service?

P - Personality – do you tend to be extroverted or introverted? Stronger in word or in action or both?

E - Experience – what life experiences point to your service qualifications?

Note that EACH of these 5 parts of who we are is FROM GOD.

Whether we call them “gifts” or “abilities” or “strengths” they are all God-given and should be used to serve the body of Christ. “USE IT OR LOSE IT”

Just remember –

1. ACCOUNTABILITY (“stricter judgment”)

- a. Since God has given you strengths, they are to be used for His glory
- b. You will be held responsible for how you use your talents (parable of the talents)
- c. Allow others in the body to help identify your spiritual strengths

2. HUMILITY (“we all stumble”)

- a. You are a sinner, gifted by grace
- b. You aren’t THAT good
- c. Accept thanks but give God all the glory (and don’t make a show)

3. REALITY (we cannot keep from stumbling)

- a. Our tongue will get us in trouble every time
- b. Yet we must strive to bridle the tongue NEXT WEEK!

JAMES, Chapter 3: 1-2 (My Paraphrase)

Think long and hard about whether God has called you to be a teacher of His Holy Word.

Why? First of all, God will give teachers a stricter judgment when it comes to handling His Word. Secondly, we are all sinners. (And this implies that a teacher will be rightly held to a higher standard by his students, as well.) And thirdly, since teaching uses a lot of words and many words lead to certain stumbling, a teacher will never be perfect in his teaching.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY demands the CONTROL of our GIFTEDNESS

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened. And two, you are developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don’t balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually “buff” without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn't?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask, really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won’t get you anything from God. He doesn’t accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God’s “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God’s spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God’s kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what’s worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true “crown of life” – God’s heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don’t ever want to hear you saying, “I am being tempted by God.” One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it’s really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don’t be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. “Good” is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

Confidence in Reactions

19-20. Now I’m going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that's still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God's Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

Confidence in Religion

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!

JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

Conviction in Works

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is "saving faith?" If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not "saving faith."

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him "blessings on you, I hope you'll be okay!" and don't make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn't backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, "Some Christians are more private, and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith." Well, if you're one of those "private in your faith" types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That's good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they're not believers!). Can't you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven't we heard Father Abraham was "justified by faith" when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works "teamed up" so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here's the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless.