

Faith in Action: A Study of James Application of Faith James 3:1-12

Trust in Christ....

- ... is not developed absent of challenge but by applying trust in the midst of challenge. (1:1-8)
- ...provides perspective to help us live God oriented lives. (1:9-18)
- ...will produce Christlikeness. (1:19-27)
- ...produces mercy as we love our neighbor as ourselves. (2:1-13)
- ...must change us. (2:14-26)

Words Have Power

3:1-5

That everyone sinned was standard Jewish doctrine; that one of the most common instruments of sin and harm was the human mouth was also a Jewish commonplace (as early as Proverbs, e.g., 11:9; 12:18; 18:21).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The concern James has already shown about sins of speech (1:19, 26) is given full exposure in this paragraph. He introduces his topic by first warning people not to be too anxious to become teachers (3:1). A particularly honored position among the Jews was occupied by the rabbi, and some of this prestige undoubtedly rubbed off on the teacher in the church. James does not want to discourage those who have the calling and the gift for teaching, but he does want to warn people about the heavy responsibility involved in teaching others about spiritual matters (see also Matt. 5:19; Acts 20:26-27). One of the reasons the teaching ministry is very difficult is that it makes use of the most dangerous, untamable member of the body: the tongue. So difficult is the tongue to control and subordinate to godly purposes that James calls the person "perfect" who is able to subdue it (v. 2).

Evangelical Commentary on the Bible

Words Show Heart

3:6-12

Some other Jewish teachers also noted the incongruity of blessing God while cursing other people, who were made in his image; even more often, they recognized that whatever one did to other humans, it was as if one did it to God himself, because they were made in his image. James's readers could not easily miss his point. This text makes clear the sort of perverse speech that 3:1-12 addresses: antagonistic speech, which fits the situation the letter as a whole addresses. Whether by incendiary rhetoric or a battle cry, cursing mortal enemies was incompatible with worshiping God, no matter how embedded it had become in Jewish patriotic tradition (since the Maccabean era).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

Although James does not specify in this paragraph the particular forms of evil speech that he has in mind, he elsewhere singles out the kind of criticism of others that springs from a judgmental attitude (4:11-12). And perhaps James would include in his strictures all those manifold sins of speech that are catalogued in Proverbs: lying, gossiping, criticizing, thoughtless and careless speaking, too much speaking.

Evangelical Commentary on the Bible

Trust in Christ must be demonstrated in our words.

Questions for Application

- Q1. Share a time when you have seen the power of your words (for good or for bad).

- Q2. What has helped you to learn to control your speech?

- Q3. How can you use your words intentionally to encourage someone this week?