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Some Identifying Marks of a Mature Soul

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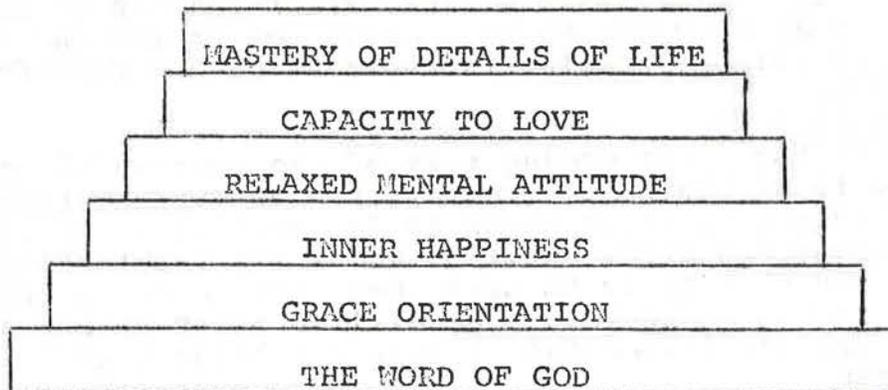
SOME IDENTIFYING MARKS OF A MATURE SOUL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
NUMBER 24
JAMES 3:1-3

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JAMES 3:1-3 "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body."

Here in the third chapter of James we are entering a different discussion. In this chapter we will study three very practical things which contribute to mature Christian living. We have often studied the construction of the Edification Complex in the soul. But to refresh your memory on this "doctrine house" which we are all building in the soul, we will diagram it here again for you.



As we go up the ladder in spiritual development we finally arrive at the place of stability or spiritual maturity. But remember this--it takes constant and diligent study to keep doctrinal truth flowing into the soul, so we won't slip back and lose the ground we have gained. There is no let up for the Christian. It is a constant daily battle and it goes on all the time from conversion to the point of death.

Chapter Outline

This chapter is divided by these three sections--

Verse 1 Here we have the subject of submission to authority without rebelling against it.

Verses 2-12 The ability to control the tongue, which is the most dangerous member of the whole body.

Verses 13-18 Characteristics of stability

JAMES 3:1 "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." We saw these words "My brethren" at the beginning of chapter one and at the beginning of chapter two. These words "adelphoi mou" refer to the Jews, but to Jews who are believers. Many of them are scattered all over the world. But it also refers to all believers of all times.

The words "be not" come from the present, active, imperative of "ginomai plus "me" and should be translated "stop becoming" and "ginomai" means to become something you were not before. So these believers were becoming something. Something had slipped into their lives which was no worth to mature believers. Now what was it? The next words answer that question. We have "many masters" and this is from "poloi didaskaloi" and it means "all were trying to take over and teach."

To understand what this means, let us look at the following points:

1. THE PASTOR IS UNDER DIRECT AUTHORITY.

The authority of the Pastor is God, God The Father. He called the Pastor to his task and he, through the Holy Spirit gave him the gift of Pastor-teacher. It is a gift which can't be worked up or bought. It is a grace gift from God. Operating under this authority, the Pastor is commissioned to do certain things.

a. Prayer

One of the major tasks of the Pastor-teacher is to stay in fellowship with God through daily confession and daily prayer. To pray without ceasing is the task of the faithful pastor-teacher.

b. Constant study

This is the never ending task of the successful pastor-teacher. If he is to teach his people, then he must be taught of God. The message he is to teach is in Scripture. He is to study and study and study until he knows the exact meaning of Scripture and then he is to pass that message on to the people. This is his MAJOR TASK. He will do other things also, but they are all incidental to this one major task.

c. Witness

Both in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, the pastor-teacher is to witness by his life, his lips, his money and his total being.

2. THE BELIEVER IS UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE PASTOR-TEACHER.

If the believer tries to teach something contrary to Scripture, he then sets himself up as superior in doctrine. This is exactly what this first verse in James three is talking about. The member is warned about learning a little doctrine and then setting himself up as authority in all doctrinal matters. So many learn just enough doctrine to make them proud, and then from that limited knowledge they pose to have real authority and knowledge. No member listens to dogmatic teaching from a pastor-teacher very long without firing at least one shot back at the pastor-teacher. But it is good to keep in mind that the pastor-teacher is the final authority from God. Remember, God in grace, picked out the pastor-teacher. He didn't earn or deserve his place.

We are talking here about principle rather than personality. It takes a "MATURE BELIEVER TO BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THE AUTHORITY OF THE PASTOR-TEACHER."

So James here is warning believers about this very principle-- "Learn not to become many teachers, but accept the authority over you." There has been a nation-wide rebellion at this very point. In our day all of life in every category has been against authority. It started by a rebellion against authority in the home.

Then it went into the school and into the military and into every realm of life. Employees began to rebel against the authority of the employer. In fact, a rebellion against authority is eating at the very foundation of the nation, and if America falls as an independent power, it will be at this point. Rebellion against authority brings chaos in every realm of life. This idea has caused many in our day to call a policeman a "pig." We have too many chiefs and not enough indians. We have too many generals and not enough privates.

3. CRITICISM SHOWS LACK OF MATURITY.

Being critical toward dogmatic Bible doctrinal teaching is a manifestation of lack of maturity. This leads to an emotional revolt of the soul and leads toward an attitude of negative volition toward doctrine.

4. IMAGINATION PLAYS THE BELIEVER A TRICK.

James knew that when believers listen to dogmatic doctrinal teaching they would sooner or later falsely assume that they can do the same. So, without a careful study of Scripture, they set up their own human viewpoint and sent it forth as Biblical truth.

5. HOW DISCIPLINE IS MEETED OUT FOR THIS ERROR.

God disciplines the Pastor-teacher who fails to be true to his calling. But the member who becomes critical of that same pastor teacher, then puts himself in line to receive the very discipline which God had intended to give the teacher. So he gets double discipline from God--the discipline he should receive, plus the discipline that would have fallen on the one he has maligned.

6. These two verses in Hebrews state quite clearly God's attitude toward this problem. Let us listen closely to them--

HEBREWS 13:7 "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

HEBREWS 13:17 "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

After verse 1 begins by saying, "My brethren, definitely stop becoming many teachers," it then goes on to say, "Knowing" and this is perfect, active, participle of "oida" and this means established knowledge. It is an established fact. "We shall receive" is a future, middle, indicative of "lambano" and it means this is certain to follow. Just as sure as we become super critics of authoritative Bible teaching, we are sure to receive major discipline. "Greater condemnation" comes from "megas krima" and it connotes the result of major judgment from God.

Now let us look as some ways we can fulfill this verse and thereby receive major discipline from God.

1. Just set yourself up as an expert over against the pastor-teacher. Make side remarks about how that certain teaching is wrong at the point or this point. Just engage in such conversation as, "We have a nice set of deacons, but..." "We have a very nice Sunday School teacher, but..." "We have a good pastor-teacher, but..." Just set yourself up as an authority so other critics will gather at your feet and get the sweet morsels of your mature criticism. That's always very helpful in rushing you on to major discipline from God.

2. Be critical of the general content of the message and then point out specific points that are incorrect.
3. The next step is to phase out in attendance as much as you can. Substitute other important things for "that discussion of Scripture which doesn't apply to me anyhow."
4. Set yourself up as an authority on what ought to be taught and how it ought to be taught. "Teach others" without even "Teaching yourself."
5. Teach false doctrine to as many as will listen to you--especially new Christians who are not well founded in doctrine.
6. Get on the telephone and be as critical as you can. Just suppose you are right in certain points? What are you doing to yourself as a person?
7. In accepting your own authority, start rejecting the authority of Scripture. In reality, you actually have rejected the authority of God.
8. Actually arrive at the point that you are as much authority as Scripture or as the one who teaches you.

So a correct translation of this verse says, "My brethren, definitely stop becoming many teachers, knowing that you shall take on to yourself major judgment from God."

This verse stands here alone at the beginning of this very practical chapter to warn us never to get so independent that we are not under authority.

And I stand here tonight listening to the warning this verse gives to me as pastor-teacher, and then I ask you to listen to the warning it gives to you.

The Centurion in Matthew 8 stands out as one of the great illustrations of grace orientation. The Centurion had a servant who was dying thirty miles away from his post. The Centurion requested Jesus to heal his servant and Jesus told him that he would go with him the thirty miles to his house and heal him. But the Centurion said, "That isn't necessary, Lord. You just speak the word and he will be healed. I too am a man under authority and I have men under my authority. I tell them to do something and they do it. I understand authority." Jesus said to the Centurion, "Go thy way, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto you." The servant was healed in that very moment. And when the Centurion got home, he asked the time when his servant was healed and they told him. He found out it had happened in the exact moment when Jesus spoke his authoritative word. This man had a fantastic understanding of authority.

Many people have to lose their freedom and authority before they come to understand freedom and authority. And today we are living in a country almost devoid of authority. We are a nation of permissiveness. This will continue until there is such a great catastrophe in this country that all freedom is taken away from us and then we will take orders from someone we cannot stand. Many of us have freedoms of which we are not aware. Today freedom is rapidly slipping through our fingers.

and before this nation hits bottom, we will lose our freedom and then it will dawn on us just how really important authority is. Though there are rays of light here and there, we are over-all at an all-time low in this nation spiritually. We hear a lot of talk about religion and The Bible, but there is a rebellion against authority in this country beyond anything we have ever known. Self-discipline and the recognition of authority is of major importance and yet there is a rebellion against all kinds of restraint.

We move now to the second stabilizing force mentioned in this chapter, and this is the control of the tongue. (Friends, let me warn you, it's going to get worse in this chapter before it gets better.)

JAMES 3:2 "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." "For" is the word "gar" used in an explanatory sense and should be translated "now." "In many things" is the accusative neuter plural of "polus" and it refers to the whole realm of sin in all categories. The word translated "offend" is "ptaio" and it means to sin. This is referring to mature believers who have built up a storehouse of doctrine but have slipped back. Immediately we expect him to launch out into the sins we think are so bad like drunkenness, murder and adultery. But that is not found here. He mentions the sin that hurts more believers than any other sin and that is the sin of the wrong use of the tongue. The more your tongue runs loose, the more your instability shows. Maligning, gossiping and the wrong use of the tongue causes more pain and trouble than any other sin. If some of you were to have your gossiping cut off tomorrow, you would die of suffocation. Some just live and breathe gossip. The tongue is hooked up with the soul. It is a link between the soul and the body and sins of the tongue signify instability in the spiritual life.

The word "if" is from "ei" and is a first class condition and it means the statement is true. "Any man" here is from "tis" and it means any believer. "Offend not" is a present, active, indicative of "ptaio" plus the negative "ouk." The words "in word" are from "en logos" and is an idiom for speaking. So it means "If one does not commit sin in what he says." This same person is a "teleios" and it means stable, mature. Then the word for man is "aner" and it means a nobleman, a man of mature judgment. The word for "able" is "dunatos" and it means this is the power which comes from the edification complex in the soul. It stabilizes the tongue.

The words "to bridle" come from "chalinagoges" and it really means to control. With a bit and bridle the rider is able to control the whole movement of the horse.

So a correct translation of this verse goes like this--

"Now we all commit many sins. Now if one does not commit sins in what he says, the same person is a mature nobleman, able also to control all the body."

Summary

1. Control of the tongue is a criterion for the control of the rest of the body.
2. The principle is established by the statement in this verse. Control of the tongue is the mark of a mature believer.
3. Therefore the control of the tongue is a sign that a mature character has been developed and a real edification complex has been erected in the soul.
4. Control of the tongue comes about by taking in maximum doctrine into the soul.
5. In the next paragraphs we will have four illustrations on the principle of the control of the tongue. This will be our next study.