



**James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (September 15, 2024)**

Once again, James offers his practical reflections for godly living. He wrote with a passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to the Word of God. He complements Paul's emphasis on justification by faith with his own emphasis on spiritual fruitfulness demonstrating true faith.

James shows concern for the spiritual development of his fellow Christians. He wants to help them understand and attain spiritual maturity (see James 1:4). He used the word "*perfect*" several times, a word that means "mature," "complete" (see James 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). By "a perfect person" (James 3:2) James does not mean a sinless person, but rather one who is balanced, mature, rounded, grown-up. It is easy to spot people who are chronologically adults but emotionally and spiritually still in their infant phase by the way they act and even speak.

Throughout his letter, James insists that faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves Christians truly belong to God, their lives will produce noticeable fruits. James places the spotlight on the necessity for believers to act in accordance with their faith. How well do our actions mirror the faith that we proclaim? James rails against the hypocritical believer who says one thing but does another.

We teach our children that God sees all and knows all. Do we live by the same standard?

Sometimes we forget who we are. Our true identity does not shine through. There seem to be **discrepancy of values and daily actions**, no unity of thoughts and behaviors, no integrity.

It's not that we don't want to live in integrity. It's that often we don't know how. We let our anger, our pride, our jealousy have the best of us. As St. Paul said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."<sup>1</sup>

If with the same tongue we praise God and curse people who are made in His likeness, are we saying we have a split personality? Are we living in integrity? Are we at least in a place where we notice it and are bothered by it?

Reminding ourselves that we live in God's presence is a good start. Hopefully, we will move on beyond that. One thing is to see God as a police officer whose job is to make sure we do right. Another is to *want* to do right *just because*. We do justice not out of fear of punishment or expecting a reward. We do what is right because being in God gives us joy. It's a matter of spiritual maturity. Everybody can get there with good spiritual discipline. Do you have one? What do you do for your soul?

As a caring pastor, James exhorts Christians to live in integrity with their faith in very practical ways. Our words reflect our faith. Our speech reveals who we are and whose we are. It expresses our personality and reveals our spiritual maturity.

*Gracie was really learning a lot in Sunday School every week, and she convinced her dad it was important to say a blessing before meals. One night Gracie's parents were arguing about something terrible before sitting down to dinner, but her father managed to use a pleasant voice to say the blessing. Gracie was*

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:15 and following

*silent a little while...and then asked, “Daddy, do you think God hears us when we pray?” Her father assured her he did think so. Then she asked, “And do you think God hears us the rest of the time too?” Her father said “Yes” to this as well. “Well, Daddy,” she asked finally, “which do you think God believes?”*

If a certain behavior of ours embarrasses us, are we ready to do something about it? When we have physical issues, we call the doctor’s office and schedule an appointment. When the disturbance is emotional and psychological, we reach out to counselors and therapists. Do we commit to the same care and attention when it is our soul that stumbles and needs support?

What our tongue does is to reveal the status of our soul. When the soul is in need of attention, our tongue will let us know. It lets things out that are rather embarrassing and hurtful:<sup>2</sup> things that offend, things that wound another person, things intended to deceive, things that would lead another person astray, falsehoods can incite people to violence.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than being upset with ourselves, and with those who display such a behavior, we may want to show compassion. What’s happening is that one’s soul is hurting and expressing itself in the best-known way. No need to judge and condemn.

Just show compassion. This does not mean that you agree with the hurtful behavior, whether yours or another person’s. It only means that this person needs caring support to elevate herself out of this tragic way of expressing her needs. We should take Peter’s invitation seriously: “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Pt 4:8)

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<sup>2</sup> [Dr. Maya Angelou on the Power of Words | Oprah's Master Class | Oprah Winfrey Network \(youtube.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/-just-exploded-springfield-woman-says-never-meant-spark-rumors-haitian-rcna171099>

Brotherly correction is essential when offered from a standpoint of genuine care.

In the gospel story, we witness such a brotherly correction: Jesus has stern words for Peter who had reacted to Jesus' announcement of his own impending rejection, arrest, death as a criminal, and eventual resurrection.

Jesus was sure that the disciples' "Messiah" answer to his inquiry about who they thought he was, was tainted by cultural expectations of a military savior. That's why he commanded them to be quiet about it. People were not ready to hear his understanding of Messiah.

And just so they were clear about its true meaning, he proceeded to instruct them. But this was too much for Peter and, I guess, for the rest of the disciples to take in. Peter fought him on this.

Peter's confusion is understandable. He felt responsible for keeping hope alive. Peter's been told the true Messiah can't possibly die. Plus, no person can rise from the dead in three days. Further, that kind of talk was politically absurd, risking condemnation of chief priests and Roman officials alike. This all puts their movement at risk and Peter doesn't want that.

Peter tried to counsel Jesus that no one willingly chooses to go along with that kind of plan. Nobody likes a loser. But Jesus responded that Peter had lost sight of what is most important in life. Jesus wanted to teach the disciples that they would lose their life for the sake of the gospel willingly in spiritual maturity.

Many of our fights evolve out of faulty expectations. Our tongue serves as faithful emissary and pours out whatever is on our mind which we believe to be "absolutely" true. Peter's thinking

was faulty because he was not open to God's plans, yet. Being ashamed of the truth produces only spiritual alienation (v. 38).

God's Messiah, whom we are called to follow, is the humble and faithful servant committed to truth and justice. Compassion leads one to side with those who suffer unjustly. This will necessarily set one on a collision course with those who wield their power to serve their own interests rather than to restore justice.

True teachers are willing to seek and speak the truth honestly and mentor students on life values and the sacredness of life. They are role models of fearless authenticity. They communicate not only factual knowledge but the rightful application of such knowledge for a balanced and whole human being. That is wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

May we learn how to connect with the Spirit of God who is Truth. May our tongue be used to praise God in all we say. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> See an example here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ipyy8yVTVoQ>