

In the School of God

By Keith Daniel

If I were ever asked to single out one chapter in the entire Bible that I believe a Christian should read every day of their lives, then without hesitation I would say James 3 where James says, *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*¹. In the margin, you will find it says “teachers of the oracles of God”—those who teach and preach the Word of God.

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. John Calvin said the word “masters” means self-appointed or self-constituted preachers. Men who were never ordained by God to preach, to teach. The Amplified Version says “for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people; thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation].” We take on ourselves greater accountability to God when we handle the Word of God and dare to preach it.

The next verse is one of the most staggering verses in the entire Bible. God says, *if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.* If any man in this building offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body, able to control every part of your character and being. You’re in control. That’s some statement. The Amplified Version says “And if any one does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things], he is a fully developed character.” He is a perfect man. He is able to control his whole body, to curb his entire nature.”

If any man—is God speaking about you?—offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. Not ultimate perfection. In the light you’ve been given, God says, there’s victory here. This man is able to control his whole body. He’s in control of his entire nature. More light, of course, comes, all the way to the end. But in God’s eyes, in the moment you’re in, you are what you ought to be. You know if a man is in control of his entire nature. He’s in victory. He’s living in the light. By one thing, God says: the foremost proof of holiness is a man’s ability to refrain from entering into any conversation whereby he becomes defiled in the sight of God.

*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. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our member, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*²

In this staggering chapter, of what you can be sure, the tongue will set the whole carnal nature aflame. When you are not in control of the tongue, it sets you on fire for everything of evil. Of all the verses in this chapter, one verse is the foundation, for without this verse we’ve got nothing but condemnation on the tongue. For then God says these staggering words: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.* One of the greatest revelations God ever gave to me of the Christian faith was when I suddenly was plunged into one of the deepest trials God entrusted me to endure. But what a revelation God gave to me in that trial.

¹ James 3:1

² James 3:2-18

I was sitting in a meeting listening to a preacher. This man in the pulpit, knowing I was in the meeting, suddenly turned on me. From the pulpit he began to lash out at me, publicly—began to undermine my integrity, the work I do for God, even the fruits and its viability. He seemed intent on destroying me. Now I don't know whether being filled with the Spirit of God means you cannot feel hurt. Some people say it does. But I was hurt, crushed. I held back the tears as I looked at this man and thought to myself "How could anyone believe this of me? How could this man believe these things of me?" By the end of that service I was so crushed I could hardly breathe. As everyone stood up I wanted to get out the door. I didn't want to speak to anyone. I wanted to speak to God. I tried to get out before anyone else, but I couldn't.

As I looked at the faces all around, and their tears, as they looked at me, I realized a cloud of sorrow had fallen on the whole convention because of what this man had done. There was grief. As I walked hands were held out to me, touching me.

"Keith, don't you worry. He's destroyed himself, not you." "Don't worry, Keith. No one believed a word he says." "He's finished. You watch. He destroyed himself, not you." But I still didn't want to speak. I was so grieved I just wanted to get out of that building. I pushed past everyone. I got out of the building and tried to get in the dark of the gardens outside of the center. But there were three preachers who stopped me. They wouldn't let me past. In their indignation and anger against what this man had done—his cowardice, the unethical way he had used the pulpit to express his grievances that he had against me—they began to cry out against what he had done to me. All the people were gathering around listening to these men. I couldn't get past them. I was about to speak the first words about what was going on in my heart, when my father-in-law, Jenny's father, pushed through the crowd, in front of these three men who were so angry. He is one of the godly men of our country, loved across the land for his preaching, though he's a farmer, and has never been through a theological seminary. He's used in the great conventions of South Africa, more than most people have ever been used, and is loved across the land. He looked at what was happening. He was in that meeting. He stood in front of those preachers, and looked at me. A tear came down his face. It had not been easy for my father-in-law to hear what had been said about me that night. He put his hand here on my shoulder.

He said, "Keith, boy, we're all in the school of God. The moment you're born of God you're in the school of God. Some of us are in Grade 1, some in Standard 1, some in Standard 6, some in Matric, and some are in the university level. Only God knows what level we are on.

"Keith, I've learned something over the years. It's exactly the same as secular school. Think, Keith, of when you were a boy, when you were still at school as a boy. You had to face tests that were given to you as you learned. You had to face each level with an exam. If you failed the exams, Keith, of the Standard you were in, you would have to go through it again, and you'd have to face the same exam again. There's no way of bypassing it. If you fail the exam, you have to face it again until you pass it. Keith, it's exactly the same in the school of God, my boy. Trust me about this. I've seen it, I've learned it. Over and over I've learned it. You're facing an extremely difficult exam here that most of us have never faced, and may never have to. But Keith, if you don't pass it now, in God's eyes, and in men's eyes—and men are watching you—I guarantee you're going to face this again. Now pass! Pass the exam, boy, or face it again." He turned and walked away.

You know, every single person—those three preachers and everyone else—said not a word. There was utter silence. They disappeared at what my father-in-law said. Gone! At last I was alone. I stood there, no one else now but me and God. No one to talk to me, no voice to listen to now. Everything, the whole perspective of what had happened that I'd gone through, was changed completely.

The next day, it was arranged at this convention that we would meet at a certain time of the day, and all the cars and combis available would take everyone across to another convention center, on the other side of the city, to join with other likeminded people and combine there. The time was announced. All the combis were to be ready, and so we wouldn't get lost going through the city, we would all travel together and get there on time for the meeting that we were to attend. As I was resting, not realizing it was time, I suddenly became aware everyone in the building was gone. So I ran outside. All the cars were idling, and the combis were all over the parking area. Everyone was already sitting in the cars. I ran down, knowing I'm keeping everybody now. They're lingering to see if there's anybody left. There I was, the only one. So I rushed around looking for a seat. Everybody was squashed in all the cars available, to get everybody there. No room! I ran around everywhere. Suddenly they pointed back, and said "There's a combi back there. It seems there's a seat." So I ran. I was keeping everybody. They all want to go. As I got close to the combi I saw there was a seat, but my heart sank when I saw the only seat available was next to this man

who tried to destroy me the night before. Everybody in that combi, when they realized I had to sit next to him, their hearts sank also.

Now that was God. It was no coincidence. That's how God works with us, you know. Well, I got in the combi, and we all went off. There was a deathly silence. No one spoke. What was I going to do to him? Well, I looked out the window and I prayed. I prayed for my heart. "Oh God, give me the grace I don't have. Give me the grace I don't have, Lord, to pass this exam. To pass this exam in God's eyes and men's eyes. Men are watching me, Lord. I want to so pass this exam that I will never, ever have to face it again, so it's behind me. Please, God, I don't want to face this again. Give me the grace, God, to pass now."

I turned and I looked at this man. He looked at me with such fear. By this time the Holy Spirit had smitten him. He knew his whole assessment was wrong. He was feeling terrible. I took him by the arm, looked him in the eyes, and said, "Sir I want you to know I love you. I want you to know from this time onward I'll be praying earnestly for you, that God will bless you." He knew, as he looked in my eyes, that I was not being obnoxious. He knew I said it in integrity from my heart, and I meant it. Then I saw something in that man's eyes that I shall treasure for all eternity. One of the most precious moments of my life was what I saw right then. I saw in the eyes of a man who so hated me—whatever the reasons the devil had given him I don't know to this day—that he tried, literally, to end me off in the ministry. I saw in this same man respect one day later. I saw respect so deep that it stunned me as I looked into his eyes. I might never have ever had that treasure to hold on to, of what I saw in that man's eyes, if I had defended myself, if I had given him what he needed in the eyes of the world. I would have lost having seen the man who made me his enemy looking at me with respect.

Why?

Because I looked to God for grace I knew I didn't have to pass this exam in God's eyes and men's eyes.

I've learned something. I've learned that no matter what difficulties you're going through, no matter what trials you're going through, no matter what tests or exams you're facing, no matter how hard they are, God will always give you the grace if you look to Him to pass. I don't care what man or the devil's doing against you. I don't care how trying it is. I guarantee you, if you look to this God for grace to pass the exam in God's eyes and men's He will give you all the grace you need. If you'll just look up from your heart, cry for it, before you react. I often from that time had occasion to think of the words my father-in-law said. I remember, shortly after that incident, sitting and thinking about what he said about the school of God being the same as secular school. You're in Standards, and you have to face exams. Unless you pass, until you pass, you can't go on. If you fail you have to go through it again, so pass! It's exactly the same as secular school.

I thought back after that incident to when I was a boy at school. I remembered I failed one Standard. That's terrible to admit, isn't it? I thought being at school was for sport. I had no idea I was there for academics. My mother and father didn't know what to do with me. I was very unsaved, let me tell you. But I really loved sport. I lived for sport—most South Africans do, it's a tragedy of our land. Sport and fun, that's what I was a school for. Poor Mommy and Daddy didn't quite know what to do to get the message through till it all caught up with me, you know. It does catch up, and I failed terribly one year.

I remembered, as I sat there thinking back, after all those years, suddenly like a vengeance it came back on me, the horror that had gripped me as a boy. The horror that just riddled through me when I realized I failed. Do you know what it was that caused the horror? It all came back, though I'd forgotten. The horror that gripped me as a boy was when I was conscious that I had been left behind. When we all started school, we all started the same neighborhood, the same school, even the same preschool. There we were all enrolled into the Versa Bays, a big Standard 1. We all learned the same things. We all faced the same exams. We all went to the next standard, 99 percent of us, just the same boys and girls right up, year after year, to the next Standard. Then I was conscious for the first time I was left behind all those that started with me. They were also conscious I was literally left behind. Everyone notices. It was grief in their hearts too I'm sure, but oh my grief, when suddenly I saw all those who started going ahead, and I'm left behind. I was a failure. That's all there was to it. I failed.

Do you know in the Bible Paul rebukes people who fail like that? Listen to what Paul says. He speaks with rebuke to those who he says "By now you should be able to be fed with strong meat, but here I have to take you through the first principles of the faith all over. Things you should have left behind before,

here I have to go over them all again with you. Feed you as babes still, with milk, and you should have been eating strong meat for men by now.³ Those who he was writing to were failures in the school of God.

The children who went ahead, they were gaining new knowledge, learning new things, sitting through new tests, new exams, going higher. Here I was, going over the same things all over again, that I'd been through before, because I didn't pass. Starting over with the same things, unable to learn further, unable to grasp further knowledge. It's a terrible thing, you know, to fail. In secular school it's a terrible thing to fail. In the school of God it's a terrible thing. I wonder how many there are, of those who name the name of Jesus, who fail in any test, anything. They fail anything that isn't perfect in circumstances.

When my grandmother died, my mother was the one that the whole family rallied around. My mother had nine brothers and sisters, and one who died. They were all married. We weren't a religious family, we weren't saved. Sunday nights all the family would come to Mommy when Grandfather died. It was wonderful to have all my cousins, all my aunts and uncles, from both sides of the family. Here was the home ground. We all met as families right through the years as we grew up. That was the night for the family, Sunday night. They all rallied around my darling mother.

Well, one of my uncle's name was Moon. You might think that's a terrible name to call a person. He was a very big man and he had no hair. Just this round, shining face. So everyone called him Moon. It was late in life when I found out what his real name was. Uncle Moon was what we call the black sheep of the family. I hope you are not called the black sheep of the family. The rest of the brothers and sisters were achievers, they achieved in everything: in their businesses, in their sports. There were a few of them who were South African champions in sports, of my mother's brothers and sisters. But Uncle Moon was the black sheep of the family. He was quite content to be, by the by. All Uncle Moon wanted, it seemed all he lived for, and I don't think there was anything else he lived for, was to make people laugh. That's terrible, but that's all he did. We only had to look at Uncle Moon and we'd laugh. We didn't have to listen to anything. He really was hilarious. Many people knew Moon, and the moment they saw him they just started laughing.

Well, on Sunday nights the grownups—the children were never allowed with the grownups in South African society—all the grownup would go in the lounge. The children were never allowed in the lounge. All of us cousins played outside until darkness, then went to the bedrooms. We so enjoyed it. But there always came a point we'd go to the lounge. There in the lounge were, of course, the grownups. They would speak of two things: politics and sports. Nothing else was ever discussed in most South African homes. It's a terrible thing. Politics, South Africa, where we were heading, what was going to happen. And sports. We dared not speak of anything else. There they were, all the grownups, fighting it out about politics, fighting it out about sports. We children always, at some point every Sunday night, would all go stand in the passage saying "Uncle Moon! Uncle Moon! Come!" It didn't take much invitation, you know, to make him leave the grownups. He wanted to be with the children. We'd get in the room and all sit down on the floor and all over the bed, around him. "Tell us stories! Tell us about the war." He was a prisoner of war you know, with the Germans. We felt sorry for the Germans, to be honest with you, when he told us things that he did. Most of those things you couldn't believe, what he did in a prisoner of war camp. We used to laugh and laugh.

One night we were talking about this thing of failing school. I think there were two of us who had done it by then. Uncle Moon said "Oh, don't worry about failing. Uncle Moon used to fail all the time at school. Terrible, because when I went to school I was bigger than all the other boys and girls. I'd look down at them. Same age. But then I failed. The next year starting out I was bigger than all the small boys and girls. And I failed again. You know what they did then? They pushed me up. They were so embarrassed. I didn't have to pass. Fancy getting through school like that. And so I failed, and failed, and failed, and they pushed me. And I failed and failed, oh I failed so much at school. You know it became a problem to the government, to the education department. They had to think how to work out a pension plan for someone still at school. That's worse than terrible. At least I hope they were joking there."

Well, I tell you something, it's a terrible thing in the school of God if someone's like that. All you do is fail. Every single exam with the lips, you fail. If things aren't perfect in your church you fail. If anything goes wrong, you fail with the lips. You fail. Terrible thing, you know.

The saddest and most tragic moment in your life and my life in the school of God is when I realize, and everyone else realizes, I just failed an exam God entrusted to me. I failed God. That moment is realized more than anything else when out of these lips come words that should never have come from a

³ Hebrews 5:12-14 paraphrased

child of God. It's a tragic moment when you realize that everyone else realizes that you just failed in the test God allowed you to face, in the test God put you in, and allowed in your circumstances. If it isn't tragic to you when you realize it, then that is a greater tragedy, noticed in your life by God and men.

I was once in a convention with hundreds of people, at lunch time in the dining hall. I was sitting with a number of preachers and missionaries. There opposite me sat a lady, a missionary, who I had revered from when I was first saved above most Christians. Her godliness, her integrity, her example. When I was a young believer she looked at me in the eyes and said "Keith, what you cannot say to a person's face in love, and for the glory of God, you cannot say at all. Because if you do, you're a coward, and a grief to God."

There this woman was sitting at this table with all these preachers, and we were eating. Two preachers sitting beside me began to speak about someone who wasn't there to defend himself. These two men suddenly decided to destroy this person's testimony, his honor. They were talking about things that I knew weren't true, because I knew this person better than they did. They were destroying any trust that could be ever shown toward him again by anyone at this table, by something which was a lie. They were scandalizing, and destroying with the tongue with a deadly poison.

Oh, the damage the tongue has done. I know of *nothing* that has done more damage to God's work, and God's people, than the tongue of Christians, this unruly evil full of deadly poison. God doesn't say that if it isn't! It destroys. It murders men. You don't have to take a knife and stab a man in the back to destroy him, to kill him. No, you might lose your testimony doing that. Many a man has been murdered more cruelly by the tongue of Christians. Many a man's honor, many a man's integrity, many a man's usefulness has been destroyed forever in one moment by the tongue of Christians.

There they were, doing it. I could hardly swallow my food I was in such a state, praying "Oh God I don't want to offend them. I have to stop them. What can I say to stop them from destroying this man?" Before I could say anything this godly woman, who had been the example to me—the words she had uttered to me I had striven to attain in life—didn't realize that sitting with such men was an exam. Just being in the company of scandalmongers is a test, a difficult test. She failed it. Caught up in the atmosphere she suddenly started talking also, saying things she could never have said to the person's face in love and for the glory of God. Never would she be able to. Do you know these men had been a terrible grief to me, but this woman—what a shock. I put my knife and fork down, and sat back so shocked. She looked at me. Silence came on the table. The tears just welled up in her eyes as she looked at me. They rolled down her face. I didn't mean to make her feel bad, I didn't mean to condemn her, but one look at me, and she was weeping. I knew why she was weeping. The others were asking "What's wrong? What is it?" as she began to weep louder and louder at the table, sobbing. I knew why she wept.

You see, it's a tragic moment when we realize, and others realize, we've failed God with the lips. If isn't tragic to you, than that's a greater tragedy. If it isn't tragic, if you don't weep, when you know you've failed God with this unruly evil, and deadly poison came out, and destroyed someone, undermined someone, oh it's a tragic thing. She wept loud as she got up, and as she walked those around tables stood up because of the reverence of her life in our country. Looking at her, no one knowing why she just sobbed, broken, walking out of the dining hall. She failed, you see. Tragic.

In the school of God I have had many teachers. I have learned many lessons from many teachers. Such godly people, that God gave me to see. Men and women who themselves were students in the school of God, but because they so excelled, in passing ever exam they faced, no matter how many difficulties came on them. They became examples of the believers. They became examples of the believers because they excelled in passing no matter what test they faced. Do you know God doesn't turn to the old men in the Bible, and say "Be an example of the believers"? Paul wrote to Timothy and said, *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word*⁴. Let no man despise thy youth.

Be thou an example of the believers in word from today.

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⁴ 1 Timothy 4:12

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