

August 3, 2017
Grace and Condemnation?

James, in his letter to the early Christian church, has said this:

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. James 3:9-10 (ESV)

Paul says this in the context of speaking about the tongue and the human ability to control (or not to control) impulses. The traditional way I have always understood this was an individualistic application – that as individual believers, there should be every effort (within the power of the Holy Spirit) to control the natural impulses and words spoken.

However, in doing some reading, I came across a commentary written by Bo Reike. He applies the truth of this in a little different way – and it certainly captured my attention. He says, “In their eagerness to appear as prophets of doom they believe that it is part of the Christian message to pronounce curses upon degraded mankind. In vs. 10 the author condemns this practice and asserts that blessings and curses out not to issue from the same mouth.”¹

He interprets the admonition about cursing and blessing in a corporate context – the church (or the preacher) or other Christian groups. He challenges the conception that a preacher can condemn the people he preaches to at the same time he utters praise and honor to God. His interpretation is interesting and caused me to take a double take.

While I do not believe that James is advocating the watering down of the truth of scripture, too many preachers/churches/Christian groups have adopted the practice of praising God for the grace they have experienced while condemning and hurling accusation toward others. I think that James does have something to say about that.

I have been criticized in some quarters because I don’t preach hell fire and brimstone and that I am too filled with grace. However, I believe that my role as a pastor/preacher/believer is not to utter curses upon the world but to speak of the great grace and redemption possible through Jesus Christ our Lord.

James (taking in Reike’s interpretation) has something to say to those loud religious voices that proclaim condemnation on the homosexual community, pro-choice proponents, and other groups that take exception with their conservative understanding of scripture. And to



¹ Bo Reike, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday& Company, 1964), 39

paraphrase James, "Can we curse the world and praise God's grace in the same breath?" I'm not so sure.

I remember what Jesus said in John. He says, ***"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."*** (John 3:17-18, ESV)

I have decided for myself that I do not need to condemn the world – they are already condemned in their own mind, heart, and soul. I am going to proclaim grace.

I think that James would encourage all believers to do the same!