

Taming the Terrible Tongue Pt.1

James 3:1–12

James 3:1–12 (NKJV)

3 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. ³ Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. ⁴ Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. ⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be

so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

Introduction

This part of James stands out in the book like a flame in the darkness. It paints a picture of the destructive nature of sin unlike any passage in the Bible. It is well known by its descriptive language of the power of the tongue, particularly words like "...it is set on fire by hell." It almost sounds like it is a little extreme, unless you have been on the receiving end of the lashing of the tongue.

It is as one pastor described it, our concealed weapon, ready at any moment to be unleashed to discourage, depress, decimate, and destroy. No reloading is necessary, no preparation is needed. Just open the 2 gates of flesh and ivory containing it and let it loose.

I'm sure we remember the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Well, that is just not true. Words can hurt and they can hurt for a lifetime. Words are like

toothpaste squeezed out of the tube....once out, they are impossible to get back in.

According to one article I read,

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year, according to the CDC. For every suicide among young people, there are at least 100 suicide attempts. Over 14 percent of high school students have considered suicide, and almost 7 percent have attempted it.
- Bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University
- A study in Britain found that at least half of suicides among young people are related to bullying
- 10 to 14 year old girls may be at even higher risk for suicide, according to the study above
- According to statistics reported by ABC News, nearly 30 percent of students are either bullies or victims of bullying, and 160,000 kids stay home from school every day because of fear of bullying.

Bully-related suicide can be connected to any type of bullying, including physical bullying, emotional bullying, cyberbullying...”

<http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/bullying-and-suicide.html>

Someone once said,
....., one criticism will instantly overrule a
thousand praises.

Words can wound and steal life. Gossip and slander bring a cheap thrill to some, while exploiting and objectifying others (the similarities to pornography are striking). False testimony uses words to misrepresent, caricature, or malign the reputation of fellow humans, usually for selfish gain. Words of condemnation, accusation, and cutting sarcasm create pain as they shame, belittle, and discourage. Coarse joking uses humor to draw attention to oneself, while sending rotten fruit into the atmosphere.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sticks-stones>

Words have tremendous power. Power to heal, and encourage and strengthen, to edify and enable. But words also have power to destroy, discourage and disable. They can bleed the very life out of a soul.

[Proverbs 12:18](#) (NKJV)

¹⁸ There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,

But the tongue of the wise *promotes* health.
Proverbs 25:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ A man who bears false witness against his neighbor
Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow.

Psalms 52:2 (NKJV)

² Your tongue devises destruction,
 Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

Proverbs 6:16–20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ These six *things* the Lord hates,
 Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him:

¹⁷ A proud look,

A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans,
 Feet that are swift in running to evil,

¹⁹ A false witness *who* speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among brethren.

Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV)

²¹ Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue,
 And those who love it will eat its fruit.

The rabbis spoke of the tongue as an arrow rather than a dagger or sword, because it can wound and

kill from a great distance. It can wreak great damage even when far from its victim.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 144). Moody Press.

Luke 6:45 (NKJV)

45.....**For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

Matthew 12:35–36 (NKJV)

. **³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.**

The tongue has a great propensity to be very evil because it finds its resource in the depravity of man. It is constantly fueled by the bent we have toward sin... and all it needs to burn is to be lit.

“The first sin committed after the Fall was a sin of the tongue. When God questioned Adam about his eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam slandered God by suggesting that He was indirectly responsible, saying, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12). In describing man’s total depravity, Paul says, “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is

under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13–14; cf. Pss. 5:9; 140:3). As he glimpsed God’s glory and holiness, Isaiah, convicted of his own sinfulness, related it to his mouth, exclaiming, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). Scripture says much about the tongue’s evil (Pss. 34:13; 39:1; 52:4; Prov. 6:17; 17:20; 26:28; 28:23; Isa. 59:3”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 144–145). Moody Press.

“In Scripture, the tongue is variously described as wicked, deceitful, perverse, filthy, corrupt, flattering, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, foolish, boasting, complaining, cursing, contentious, sensual, and vile.someone has observed that because the tongue is in a wet place, it can easily slip”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 144). Moody Press.

But lest I give a unbalanced view of the tongue, we need to know that the tongue can be a great means of encouragement and healing. The tongue can talk a man down from the cliff. It can sooth the wounds that life inflicts. It can heal years of conflict.

It can ask for forgiveness and restore a broken soul. It can say I love you, and I'm here for you when you need me. It can build up the torn down. It can encourage the depressed. It can warn of danger. It can restore relationships.

It can confess Jesus as Lord and Savior and speak the gospel to lost souls. Nothing is as powerful from the human perspective as good words from a right heart.

[Proverbs 12:18](#) (NKJV)

¹⁸ the tongue of the wise *promotes* health.

[Proverbs 16:24](#) (NKJV)

²⁴ Pleasant words *are like* a honeycomb,
Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

[Proverbs 10:20–21](#) (NKJV)

²⁰ The tongue of the righteous *is* choice silver;...

²¹ The lips of the righteous feed many,...

“Words of praise have healing power. Communities and families thrive when members notice the best in each other and verbalize it. Mutual celebration is a hallmark of life together as Spirit-filled daughters and sons. Words of encouragement will "put courage into" those who are weak, afraid, and torn down. A

timely rebuke protects a friend from self-destructive patterns. A gentle word turns away wrath (**Prov. 15:1**) and halts the cycle of evil. Grace-filled words engage skeptical minds and doubting hearts (**1 Peter 3:15–16**)."

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<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sticks-stones>

Someone calculated that a man speaks 25,000 words a day while a woman can speak 30,000 and that most men have spoken their 25,000 by the time they arrive home from work, while the wife's 30,000 has just begun.

Review.

Our last 2 sermons have clearly shown us the difference between saving faith and non-saving faith. We have learned that there is a faith that does not save. A belief in God and in Christ that will not deliver ones soul from Hell. It was sobering, alarming and frightful to know that there are many who are on the broad road to destruction that attend religious services and participate in ministry. It is also representative of what we see today in so many religious circles. There are thousands who have made a profession but have no works or fruits of

their faith and are in many cases indistinguishable from the lost.

We learned that we are saved apart from works but that true saving faith without works is dead, useless, and empty. Non saving!

In a continuing theme, James is showing us one of the fruits of saving faith is related to the tongue.

In verse 10, he alludes to this reality,

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

Scientists maintain that once a sound wave is set in motion, it continues on a never-ending journey, and that, if we had sophisticated enough instruments, each wave could be captured and reproduced at any time. If that is true, every word spoken by any person who has ever lived could be retrieved! God, of course, needs no such instrument

Jesus says that in the day of Judgement, the fruit of your tongue, your words, will be enough to verify whether you have saving faith.

Matthew 12:36-37 (NKJV)

³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

This is truly astonishing. Jesus is saying that what you say is a valid indicator of conversion. In other words, in salvation, there should be noticeable difference in the speech and truthfulness of the words spoken by those that are saved. Wow!!

.....demand for a productive faith is continued but with a difference. James insists that a living faith also must produce an inward result, the development of self-control. And this power of self-control is tested most readily in the matter of controlling the tongue. James agreed with Jesus (Matt. 12:34–37) that a man’s words are the revelation of his character. As the organ of speech, a man’s use of his tongue provides a ready revelation of his inner nature,

James 1:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless.

The tongue is *you* in a unique way. It is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 144). Moody Press.

So it is of utmost importance that we learn what the Bible says about the tongue. And if you are wondering why I have not mentioned certain verses that come to your mind, just wait... I will.

Lesson

The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue
The Potential Perfection by the Tongue
The Pervasive Power of the Tongue.

I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί μου,

The word teachers is emphatically forward. in the sentence, before my brethren.

James 3:1 (LSB)

1 Do not, many *of you*, become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.

James' emphasis is on making sure you brethren understand the severity of judgement that will fall on the teacher.

So the command is give, for not so many to jump on the wagon to become teachers.

A teachers primary tools is his tongue and the words that he uses. A biblical teacher has tremendous weight and responsibility. With his words he is able go instruct accurately or can lead away in error. He can make something understandable that is complex or he can muddy the waters of what is simple.

1320. διδάσκαλος *didáskalos*; gen. *didaskálou*, masc. noun from *didáskō* (1321), to teach. Instructor, master, teacher.

(I) A teacher (Rom. 2:20; Heb. 5:12). The term occurs fifty–eight times in the NT, forty–eight times in the Gospels, forty–one refer to Jesus (twenty–nine in direct address). There are *didáskaloi* in the churches (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11). Paul calls himself a **teacher** (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). It correlates with *mathētés* (3101), a learner, pupil, disciple (Matt. 10:24, 25; 12:38; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; Mark 4:38; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20; 10:35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; Luke 3:12; 6:40; 7:40; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; John 8:4; 20:16). When used in addressing Jesus (Matt. 22:16; John 1:38), it is meant as a name of respect as given to the Jewish scribes (Luke 2:46) as was the custom of the time. Jesus assumed the absolute title of being called *Ho Didáskalos*, “The Teacher” (a.t. [Matt. 26:18]).

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

Didaskaloi (**teachers**) was often used of rabbis and any who functioned in an official teaching or preaching role (cf. John 3:10), suggesting that James was speaking of the teaching office in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Above all else, rabbis were master teachers and were accorded great honor and respect by their fellow Jews. As reflected in the gospels, many rabbis relished their prestige and privilege. Jesus said of the scribes and the Pharisees, many of whom were rabbis, that they “have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.... But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the

synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men” (Matt. 23:2, 5–7).

In some Jewish circles, rabbis were held in such high regard that a person’s duty to his rabbi was considered greater than that to his own parents, because his parents only brought him into the life of this world, whereas his rabbi brought him into the life of the world to come. It was written that if a man’s parents and his rabbi were captured by an enemy, the rabbi was to be ransomed first. Although rabbis were not allowed to take money for their services but were to support themselves with a trade, it was considered an especially pious act to take one into your house and support him in every way possible.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 146–147). Moody Press.

This is not an attack upon the office of the teacher or the teaching function, for James at once identifies himself as a teacher. Rather, he is seeking to restrain the rush to teach on the part of those not qualified.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 185). BMH Books.

The verb rendered “presume to be” (*ginesthe*) basically means “to become,” while the present tense pictures continuing action. The negative with the imperative implies

that there was a movement on the part of many to pose as teachers, but this movement had to be halted

The term “teachers,” occurring only here in this epistle, is not to be restricted to officially appointed teachers but includes all who arise to instruct their fellow members. In these Jewish Diaspora congregations, there were recognized “teachers” whose ministry was concerned with the doctrinal and moral training of the members. But obviously it was not an officially limited group, and this ministry was actively shared by various members of the congregations.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 186). BMH Books.

To a degree, we are all teachers and carry that responsibility and weight

[Matthew 28:19–20](#) (NKJV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching** them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

But what James is talking about is the formal recognized teachers of an assembly who weekly instruct the body of Christ in some form, whether here as the local assembly or in Bible studies.

Acts 13:1 (NKJV)

13 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Ephesians 4:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

By its very nature, Christianity gave a prominent place to teaching (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 13:1; Eph. 4:11) and encouraged believers to be teachers (Heb. 5:12). That freedom to teach obviously prompted certain members conceitedly to seize the opportunity to become teachers without being adequately

qualified or realizing the responsibility involved. They desired the esteem of being acknowledged teachers without paying the price demanded by the position

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 186). BMH Books.

Elders and pastors are according to
[1 Timothy 3:6](#) (NKJV)

⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

Many teachers in the church today are poorly grounded in Scripture and ill-equipped to teach it. Such teachers who misrepresent God's Word can do more spiritual and moral damage to God's people than a hundred atheists or secularists attacking from outside. That is why it is so foolish and spiritually dangerous to have newly converted celebrities, or any other new convert, as well as untrained and unaccountable preachers, speaking and teaching.....When the apostle himself was converted, the Lord trained him in the Arabian desert of Nabatea for some three years before he began his apostolic ministry (Gal. 1:17–18; see also Acts 9:19–22).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 149–150). Moody Press.

They hold a place of esteem and are the primary teachers in the church.

1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

“Because you know” (*eidotes*) (Perfect.Act. Part.) renders a causative participle with a linear force, implying that those being warned did know that in assuming to be teachers they did thereby place themselves under the fact of stricter accountability. Joined to the hortatory verb, the participle also has a hortatory force; let them not forget that as teachers they “will be judged more strictly

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, pp. 186–187). BMH Books.

The great Scottish Reformer John Knox was so awed and burdened by the responsibility to declare God’s Word faithfully that, before his first sermon, he wept uncontrollably and had to be escorted from the pulpit until he could compose himself. One pastor reportedly said of preaching what could also be said of teaching: “There is no special honor in preaching.

There is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest.... To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [*James*](#) (p. 150). Moody Press.

knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

“Will be judged more strictly,” more literally “greater judgment we will receive,” clearly states what is involved. The noun “judgment” (*krima*) denotes the verdict pronounced by the judge. The term in itself is neutral, but in the New Testament it generally expresses an adverse judgment (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47; 1 Tim. 5:24). The future tense looks forward to the time when as teachers they will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Cor. 5:10) and be judged according to the impact of their lives. “The test of all ministry must come at last in the day of trial and fiery inquisition of God; this and not the world’s opinion will be the real

approval.” “More strictly” (*meizon krima*, “greater judgment”) implies that they have not faithfully fulfilled the duties of the work that they rashly assumed. Judgment will be according to the principle that increased influence means increased responsibility; the greater the impact upon others, the greater the accountability.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 187). BMH Books.

The Greek noun *krima* (**judgment**) is neutral and can be either positive or negative. But in the New Testament it is most often used negatively as a warning, and that is clearly the kind of **judgment** James has in mind here. For unbelievers, the future tense (**will incur**) refers to the Great White Throne judgment spoken of by John in Revelation 20:11–15. Believers, on the other hand, **will incur ... judgment** in the form of chastening in this life and at Christ’s bema seat for eternal reward, when “each one of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12), and

each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it

remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:13–15)

The teacher's eternal reward will reflect the faithfulness of his teaching (Acts 20:26–27; Heb. 13:17).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 150–151). Moody Press.

2 Timothy 4:1–2 (NKJV)

I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Acts 20:26–27 (NKJV)

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

II. The Potential Perfection by the Tongue

2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a **perfect** man, able also to bridle the whole body.

2 For we **all** stumble in many things.

“All” (*hapantes*), “everybody,” is the strong form of the adjective, and James places it last with great emphasis. The statement is not to be limited to teachers; it is true of all humans

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 187). BMH Books.

537. ἅπας *hāpas*; fem. *hāpasa*, neut. *hāpan*, adj. from *hāma* (260), together, and *pās* (3956), all, but stronger than the basic *pās*. All, the whole, universally

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

The word “**stumble**,” as in 2:10, denotes a moral lapse. In its literal sense the term conveys the

picture of the foot striking against some obstacle so as to cause the individual to trip or stumble; metaphorically it denotes the fact of a failure in duty, a mistake that is blameworthy, or a sin. Lenski notes that to “stumble” does not necessarily suggest a fatal fall; it denotes a failure that arrests our progress along the road. The present tense here denotes iterative action, indicating that such experiences of stumbling occur repeatedly in life

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, pp. 187–188). BMH Books.

Wow, what a self evident truth if there ever was one.

Proverbs 20:9 (NKJV)

⁹ Who can say, “I have made my heart clean,
I am pure from my sin”?

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ For *there is* not a just man on earth who does
good
And does not sin.

Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But we are all like an unclean *thing*,
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;

We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

Romans 3:10–13 (NKJV)

¹⁰ As it is written:

“There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.*

¹² *They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”*

¹³ *“Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;*

Romans 7:21 (NKJV)

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Galatians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a **perfect** man, able also to bridle the whole body.

. **τέλειος *teleios***; fem. *teleía*, neut. *teleion*, adj. from *télos* (5056), goal, purpose. Finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing.

(i) Generally (James 1:4, 17, 25; 1 John 4:18 [cf. Heb. 9:11]; Sept.: Ex. 12:5). Figuratively, in a moral sense, of persons (Matt. 5:48 [cf. Luke 6:36]; Matt. 19:21; Col. 1:28; 4:12; James 1:4; 3:2); the will of God (Rom. 12:2; Sept.: Gen. 6:9; 1 Kgs. 11:4). When used in a moral sense referring to God's expectation of us, it means completely blameless. A "perfect gift" in James 1:17 means one that has all the necessary qualities. In James 1:4, "that ye may be perfect" means that you may keep yourself "unspotted from the world." It has a similar meaning in Matt. 5:48; 19:21; Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:28; 4:12; James 3:2.

(ii) Specifically of persons meaning full age, adulthood, full-grown, of persons, meaning full-grown in mind and understanding (1 Cor. 14:20); in knowledge of the truth (1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15; Heb. 5:14); in Christian faith and virtue

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

James 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be **perfect** and complete, lacking nothing.

[James 1:17](#) (NKJV)

¹⁷ Every good gift and every **perfect** gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

[James 1:25](#) (NKJV)

²⁵ But he who looks into the **perfect** law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

So there are 2 possible meanings

One carries the idea of absolute perfection, of being without any flaw or error. If that is James's meaning here, he is obviously speaking hypothetically, since no human being but Jesus would qualify for that sort of perfect speech.

But the term can also mean complete, or mature. If that is the sense intended here, the idea is that a person who **does not stumble in what he says** gives evidence of a purified and mature heart, which is the source of his righteous speech

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 151–152). Moody Press.

The contrast here seems to be between the fact that we all stumble and fail in many ways but the

one who has the ability to control the tongue is Perfect and therefore would show the ability to control every other sin propensity in the body. But his point is since no one is perfect, and no one is able to control the tongue 100%, it shows the nature of the beast.

2 For we all **stumble** in many things. If anyone does not **stumble** in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

4417. πταίω *ptaíō*; fut. *ptaísō*. To stumble, fall (Sept.: 1 Sam. 4:2; 2 Sam. 18:7). In the NT, used figuratively, meaning to fall into sin.

(I) To err, offend, fail in duty, with *en* (1722), followed by a dat. (James 2:10; 3:2). Used in an absolute sense (Rom. 11:11; James 3:2; Sept.: Deut. 7:25).

(II) To fail, of success and happiness (2 Pet. 1:10).

Deriv.: *áptaistos* (679), without stumbling.

Syn.: *husteréō* (5302), to fall short; *parabaínō* (3845), to transgress; *skandalízō* (4624), to offend; *hamartánō* (264), to sin; *proskóptō* (4350), to stumble against.

Ant.: *orthopodéō* (3716), to walk in a straight line, to act uprightly; *stoichéō* (4748), to walk orderly.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

2 For we all **stumble** in many things. If anyone does not **stumble** in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to **bridle** the whole body

5468. χαλιναγωγέω *chalinagōgēō*; contracted *chalinagōgṓ*, fut. *chalinagōgēsō*, from *chalinós* (5469), a bridle, and *ágō* (71), to lead, direct, govern. To direct or restrain by a bridle. Figuratively, to restrain, govern or control (James 1:26, of the tongue; 3:2, of the body).

Syn.: *anakóptō* (348), to hinder, check.

Ant.: *lúō* (3089), to loose; *apolúō* (630), to release from oneself; *aníēmi* (447), to loose, relax; *eklúō* (1590), to relax; *aphíēmi* (863), to let go; *eleutheróō* (1659), to liberate.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

One of the first steps to repentance of sin is the recognition of it and one of the first steps to controlling the tongue is the recognition of the

difficulty it is to tie down that slippery, slithering snake.

We need to understand just how profound the battle is to prepare to fight.

James is not saying this so we can give an excuse for our lack of control of the tongue, but rather to prepare us for the on going intensity of the war with the tongue.

This seems to be the flow of thought in James mind. The tongue is small but powerful, and controlling and hard to control

I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

II. The Potential Perfection by the Tongue

III. The Pervasive Power of the Tongue.

3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.

4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

James uses two analogies to show the power of the tongue to control. First he points out that **if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.** This illustration is particularly appropriate, because the bit lies on top of a horse's tongue, and when attached to the bridle and reins, it is possible for the rider using that bit to easily make the horse obey. Controlling **horses' mouths** controls their heads, which, in turn, **direct their entire body as well.**

Zodhiates, indeed, suggests that this plural may indicate "a recognition of individual differences in horses" and that "for various kinds of horses there are corresponding bridles." He makes the application "Let no man complain if the kind of bridle God puts into his mouth is different from the one He

puts into another's and if it hurts a little more than another's."

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 190). BMH Books.

Even gentle horses, which have been ridden for many years, are not controllable without **bits** in their **mouths**. As long as they are expected to perform service, whether for riding or for pulling a wagon or plow, they require that control. So it is with believers. To be useful to God, we will need our tongues controlled, with everything else following in submission.

The second illustration is that of a ship. **Look at the ships also**, James continues, **though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires**. The largest **ships** of that day were small compared to the gigantic ocean liners and warships of modern times. But the ship in which Paul traveled on his voyage to Rome had a total of 276 persons on board, including the crew, soldiers, and prisoners (Acts 27:37), indicating it was a fairly large vessel.

these winds as "strong" (*sklērōn*), or "stiff," suggesting that these strong winds cannot be made

to swerve from their course. Whereas these strong winds move the ships, they also, in the absence of effective control, could cause their ruin.

The point of present interest for James is that these ships “are steered by a very small rudder,” in spite of their bulk and the force of the winds. The rudder of ancient ships was an oarlike projection fastened to the ship’s Stern

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 191). BMH Books.

In any case, James’s point is that, compared to its overall size, a ship’s rudder is very small, yet can easily steer the vessel **wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.**

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 153). Moody Press.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

Like the bit in a horse’s mouth and the rudder of a ship, **the tongue** has power to control the rest of us. It is a master control for the whole **body**, directing virtually every aspect of behavior. Commentator J. A. Motyer writes,

If our tongue were so well under control that it refused to formulate the words of self-pity, the

images of lustfulness, the thoughts of anger and resentment, then these things are cut down before they have a chance to live: the master switch has deprived them of any power to “switch on” that side of our lives. The control of the tongue is more than an evidence of spiritual maturity; it is the means to it. (*The Message of James* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1985], 121)

boasts of great things.

The Textus Receptus reads the expression as one word (*megalauchei*), meaning “to be proud, to talk big.” Then the thought is of the arrogant spirit displayed. The reading as two words is better attested and more suitable to the context.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 192). BMH Books.

Although the Greek word for *boast* (*aucheō*) is found only here in the NT, the idea of “boasting” is often negative, involving arrogant presumptuousness before God

Moo, D. J. (2000). [The letter of James](#) (p. 155). Eerdmans; Apollos.

But he obviously has in mind man’s natural inclination to boast, to be self-centered, and—contrary to the claims of much popular psychology—to have a high self-image. Whenever and however **the tongue boasts**, it leaves a wake of destruction.

It tears down others; it destroys churches, families, marriages, and personal relationships. It can even lead to murder and to war.

James 4:13–16 (NKJV)

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

In order for the tongue to control our lives in the right way, we must resist the ever-present inclination and temptation to boast and brag. We should speak only gracious words, kind words, words that build up rather than tear down, that edify, comfort, bless, and encourage. They should be words of humility, gratitude, peace, holiness, and wisdom. Such words, of course, can only come from a heart that not only is indwelt by the Holy Spirit but is also wholly submitted to His control.

Nowhere is the relationship between faith and works more evident than in a person's speech. What you are will inevitably be disclosed by what you say. (*We place a thermometer under the tongue when we are sick to tell our physical temperature the serious nature of our sickness, mine*) It might be said that (what roles of a persons tongue) a person's speech is a reliable measure of his spiritual temperature, a monitor of the inner human condition. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). *James* (p. 144).

Moody Press.

One way of keeping our tongue in check and restraining our words is by allowing the Words of Christ to fill our mind and our soul.

Colossians 3:16–18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.