

# Studies from the Epistle of James

3: 1-12 The tongue

3: 13-18 The two wisdoms

## James 3 (New American Standard Bible)

### The Tongue Is a Fire

<sup>1</sup>Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup>For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

<sup>3</sup>Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. <sup>4</sup>Look at the ships also, 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.

<sup>5</sup>So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

<sup>7</sup>For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup>But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup>from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

<sup>11</sup>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

### Wisdom from Above

<sup>13</sup>Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. <sup>17</sup>But

**the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**<sup>1</sup>Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup>For we all stumble in many ways If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.**

Teaching can be a real ego trip. Teachers are usually respected and those of us who teach (often/sometimes) have the attention of our class. What we say is normally considered as having a mark of authority. Because of this, James says those who teach must be very careful in what they say because they are held (by the Lord) to a higher standard. As we teach, we must remember that our words matter and that we will be judged on the basis of the truth, wisdom and soundness of our teaching.

The Greek word James uses here (v-2) that is translated as “stumble” has a deeper meaning than to simply lose your footing. It indicates a mistake that will hinder our relationship with the Lord. James says that all of us stumble, In his mind, the one who does not stumble in what he says is capable of maintaining balance in most other ways, too.

Words are powerful and the wise teacher chooses their words carefully. Even small words (seemingly insignificant words) can have great impact.

**<sup>3</sup>Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. <sup>4</sup>Look at the ships also, 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. <sup>5</sup>So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.**

The bit in the mouth of a horse provides control of the entire animal. Likewise the small rudder of a great ship allows the pilot to control the path of the entire ship, even through strong currents and forceful winds. James goes on to tell us that even small words have similar powers. One casual word can start a fire that will consume us. One bad word can defile the entire body – change the course of a life.

**<sup>7</sup>For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup>But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup>from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.**

**<sup>11</sup>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.**

We have the ability to tame almost all creatures, but no one can tame an errant tongue. James says it is a restless evil and a deadly poison, capable of bringing out both blessing and curse. The same tongue that blesses the Lord can right away curse a fellow man, who is made in God's image.

What a bad thing a tongue can be! It should not be this way. It is contrary to the uniformity and consistency of nature. It is dangerous – evil and poison if not controlled.

### **Wisdom from Above**

**<sup>13</sup>Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**

The wise and understanding man shows his wisdom and understanding in the way he handles (his tongue) his behavior.

**<sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition of the heart, combined with arrogance can do must damage. These things are earthly (not from above). They are sinful and demonic. They create disorder and every evil thing.

**<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

The Lord's wisdom is

- First of all pure – not contaminated
- Peaceable – Creating peace
- Gentle
- Reasonable
- Full of Mercy
- Full of good fruits
- Unwavering
- Without hypocrisy

It is the seed whose fruit is righteousness. It is sown in peace by those who make peace.