

JAMES: PRACTICING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

VI. Bridling The Tongue

(James 3:1-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Though the Epistle of James offers little formal structure and is less concerned about theological concepts than other New Testament works, it is intensely practical, explaining how to be "doers" of God's Word, James 1:22.
- B. A significant virtue in a truly righteous Christian life is controlling one's speech as is taught in James 3:1-12. We view this passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Bridling The Tongue, James 3:1-12.

- A. James warned that not many of us believers in the church should "become" (*ginesthe*, 2 person plural present imperative of *ginomai*, "become;" U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 784; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 78; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 157-159) literally "teachers" (*didaskaloi*, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.), knowing that we "teachers" will receive the greater "condemnation" (*krima*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 451-452), that is, "Since teachers use their tongues (to instruct others) more, they will be judged more strictly" by the Lord, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to James 3:1.
- B. After all, we believers in general stumble in many ways [in the things that we say], James 3:2a NIV, ESV.
- C. Yet, if anyone does not stumble in "word," he is a [spiritually] "fully developed" (*teleios*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 816-817) "adult man" (*aner*, Ibid., p. 65-66), able also to bridle the whole body, James 3:2b.
- D. James then described the powerful force of one's speech, using several illustrations in doing so, James 3:3-5:
 - 1. Man puts bits into horses' mouths that they might obey him, and man turns about the whole body of the large horse merely by means of the relatively small bit, James 3:3.
 - 2. Similarly, though sea-going ships are so large in size, driven by strong winds, yet they are turned about by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs, James 3:4 ESV.
 - 3. Though the tongue is a small member of the human body, it boasts great things due to its power, Jas. 3:5a.
- E. James then described the great damage that uncontrolled speech can produce, James 3:5b-10a:
 - 1. The unbridled tongue or uncontrolled speech is like a fire that can set ablaze an entire forest, James 3:5b.
 - 2. Like a destructive fire, an unbridled tongue is like a world of unrighteousness that stains the rest of one's body, setting on fire his entire course of life. The tongue is even set on fire "by hell," figurative for Satan's involvement in using the tongue, James 3:6 ESV. (R. V. G. Tasker, The Gen. Epis. of Jas., 1974, p. 76-77)
 - 3. Every kind of beast, bird, reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the human tongue or unrestrained human speech, James 3:7-8a ESV.
 - 4. Indeed, the human tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison, James 3:8b ESV. With it one blesses the Lord and Father while with it one also curses people who are made in the image of God so that from the same mouth comes forth both edifying blessing and destructively evil cursing, James 3:9-10a ESV.
- F. Accordingly, James admonished his readers to bridle their tongue, to control their speech, James 3:10b-12:
 - 1. James admonished his readers that they should not bless and to curse with their speech, James 3:10b.
 - 2. He illustrated his admonition by use of rhetorical questions that expect a negative answer in James 3:11-12. [Such questions in the Greek New Testament use the negative particle *me* with the indicative mood of the verb, what consistently, repeatedly appears in the questions in James 3:11-12 (Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T., p. 785; J Gresham Machan, N. T. Grk. for Beginners, 1966, p. 1970)]
 - a. James rhetorically asked if a spring pours forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water, to which he expected the negative answer "Of course not!" from his readers, James 3:11.
 - b. He rhetorically asked if a fig tree could bear olives, or a grapevine could produce figs, to which his readers were expected to answer, "Of course not!" from his readers, James 3:12a.
 - c. James then stated that a salt pond could not also yield fresh water, James 3:12b.
 - 3. He thus implied that his readers were to use their tongues not wrongly to harm, but rightly to edify.

Lesson: We should not aim to teach spiritual truths without fully bridling our speech, for we can easily harm with our speech due to its great destructive power under the influences of our sinful natures and Satan.

Application: (1) May we rely on the Holy Spirit to boycott the sinful nature before we teach that we not sinfully harm with our speech, Galatians 5:16-23. (2) As we are in the process of teaching, may we realize our great accountability to God to KEEP ON RELYING on the Holy Spirit to AVOID doing great, unedifying harm.