



James 3:1-12

James 3:1-12 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.

Things To Note About This Passage:

1. A horse's mouth has an interdental space between the front teeth (incisors) and the back teeth (molars). This area of gum is where the bit sits.
2. For the sake of example, the rudder of the SS France weighs 74 tons, which may seem a lot, but is less than .1% of the weight of the ship (over 76,000 tons gross).
3. Fires have two important characteristics that relate well to the tongue. First, they can be far-reaching in their devastation. Second, they can be uncontrollable.
4. "The course of nature" (vs. 6) is a mysterious phrase and has been variously translated by different versions of the Bible. The first word, translated as "course" or "cycle" or "wheel" comes from a word that means "to run" and refers to anything that runs or rolls like a wheel. The word translated as "nature", "life", "existence", or "birth", is the Greek word from which we derive our English word genesis and means "beginning" or "birth". Taken together, this phrase means "that which is set in motion at birth". In other words, it refers to our whole life, beginning at birth.
5. When James says that every creature has been tamed (vs. 7), he does not mean that all creatures have been domesticated or trained, but that they are under the dominion of human beings, as also God said in Genesis 1:26-28.

What This Passage Tells Us:

1. Like a horse's bit or a ship's rudder, the tongue is comparatively small, but is able to have great influence.
2. Like a fire, the tongue is far-reaching in its influence, and uncontrollable.
3. The tongue influences everything in our lives from the beginning of our lives. In agreement with this, Prov 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."
4. The tongue defiles a person, as Jesus also said in Mat 15:11, and is full of deadly poison.

5. Although every living creature can be brought under the dominion of mankind, the tongue is uncontrollable. Perhaps this is why the psalmist prayed (Ps 141:3), “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

6. It is not logical for the one spring to produce both fresh and bitter water. In the same way, fruit trees only produce one kind of fruit. As Jesus said, (Mat 12:34) “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Questions For Discussion:

What is the best way to control our tongues?

What does “death and life are in the power of the tongue” mean?

What does it mean when it says that the tongue is “full of deadly poison” (vs. 8)?

Where does the Holy Spirit fit into all this? Discuss this in the context of Ps 141:3: Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Jesus said, (Mat 12:36-37), “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.” Should this be a cause for concern for Christians with loose tongues?