

James 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

This was one verse that I was especially glad to have other translations available. It makes the same sense in the King James after you read the other translations—Not many of us should want to take on the role of teacher. The role of teacher or master is so important because you have the power to influence the lives of others to a great degree. God does not look on this responsibility lightly. He will hold us accountable for what we teach.

Following is the entry from Strong's regarding the original Greek for *condemnation*: “a decision (the function or the effect, for or against (“crime”)):—avenge, condemned, condemnation, damnation, + go to law, judgment.”

In other words, it is considered a crime to misrepresent God and/or His word. I pray so often that God will speak through me, especially when I am leading my small groups of new believers. I don't want to mislead them in any way. I try to be very careful to tell them what is my opinion and then encourage them to search the scriptures on their own.

James 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

The word *offend* in the Greek means to cause to stumble, to trip, to err. We all mess up along the way in different ways; none of us is perfect. Any person who never makes a mistake in what he says or how he says it is a perfect man. (And Jesus was the only perfect man.) The man with that kind of self-discipline and control over his mouth would be able to control the actions of his whole body. I think the Lord is making the point through James that our tongue is the hardest member of our body to control. Usually, a person will think before acting (at least a little bit ahead of time). One usually acts based on decisions made for whatever reason. The tongue on the other hand is often in gear before the brain is—at least that has been my experience.

James 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

James 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though *they be* so great, and *are* driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

Now James gives a couple of very easily understood examples. Big horses can be controlled and directed by a relatively small piece of metal in its mouth. Big ships can be directed and kept on a course in spite of strong winds through a relatively small rudder.

James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

In the same way, the tongue is responsible for great things—both good and bad. It is a very small part of the body, but has so much power to affect the lives of others. Just as a little spark can start a great big fire, so the tongue (sometimes through the smallest statement) can impact the lives of others for good or bad. We are so susceptible to be influenced by what others think of us or by the

opinions and thoughts of those we admire. We can even be made to believe lies if they are repeated to us often enough. The media knows this well; that is what makes it such a powerful influence in our lives.

James 3:6 *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

“world” - a prim. word; *order, the world*:—adornment(1), world(184), world’s(1).

I thought it was interesting to see the Greek for the word *world*. I think the better translation would have been *adornment*. The tongue is a fire (a destructive or purifying force); it is an adornment of iniquity. Iniquity speaks of what is morally wrong, unrighteousness, and injustice. I think of an adornment as a decoration, something that helps you achieve a desired effect. The tongue is certainly useful in the accomplishment of “iniquity.” James is using strong language to emphasize the importance of what he is saying. When the tongue is used in a destructive, evil, unrighteous way, it defiles (stains, soils, pollutes) the whole body. (i.e., “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” **1Cor 5:6**)

I had to think a bit about the phrase “setteth on fire the course of nature.” I think it helps to see the source from the Greek for the word nature.

“nature” - 1078. *ge+nesis* genesis, *ghen'-es-is*; from the same as 1074; nativity; figuratively, nature:—generation, nature(-ral).

1074. *genea*; *genea*, *ghen-eh-ah'*; from (a presumed derivative of) 1085; a generation; by implication, an age (the period or the persons):—age, generation, nation, time.

The implication seems to me to talk about the effect the destructive power of the tongue can have on people for/from a certain period of time. It’s like—what I choose to share with those in my area of influence are the ones most affected. If I speak with racism or lack of respect or with insult or _____, then it will have the most influence on those in my sphere of influence, i.e., my children, family, class, city, state, generation, etc.

“it is set on fire of hell” – My thoughts are that James is saying that the destruction/evil that can come from the tongue is a “gift” from the master of deception and charm and evil use of the tongue—Satan. He used it to deceive Adam and Eve and we have inherited the sin nature that makes it one of the easiest and most effective tools for Satan to accomplish his purposes through us.

James 3:7 *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:*

James 3:8 *But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

Again, James is trying to help us understand the difficulty of controlling the tongue. Man has the ability to exert his control over many of the creatures of creation. It is another strong statement that James makes—NO ONE can tame (control, subdue) the tongue. It is *unruly* (Greek--unrestrainable, unstable,

restless) and *evil* (bad, loathsome, worthless, depraved, injurious). It is like he is comparing us to a deadly, poisonous snake that can bring about swift injury and/or destruction.

I think James is trying to make us understand that we must always be on guard and very careful and thoughtful before we speak. Obviously, we are going to say things as Christians that we regret (in my case many things). That is why he is emphasizing so much the fact that the tongue can't be tamed. If something is tame, it is subdued, spiritless, gentle, mild, and meek according to Webster. If we are honest, we have to admit that our "tongue" is only subdued when our emotions are not stirred in anger, frustration, impatience, etc. It takes continuous effort and thought and humility to be able to control the tongue. The more submitted we are to the control of the Spirit in our life, the more we are filled with the truths of God's word, the more victorious we can become in this area—but we can never rest on the fact that we have "tamed" our tongue for good.

James 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

James 3:11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?

James 3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so *can* no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

James is pointing out how against the divine order/intent the function of our tongue has become. One person can speak words of blessing and praise toward God the Father and then turn right around and curse another person for whatever reason. Man is made in the image of God. We are to show respect for one another. When we curse another person, we are by inference reflecting on the Creator. James is saying that this is not right. If you go to a fountain to get a drink of water, you expect to get the same refreshing drink every time you go. You don't expect it to be sweet to the taste one time and bitter (salt water, cf v12) the next. So it should be with the words that come from our mouth. As believers, they should consistently honor the Savior. When you plant a fig tree, you expect to get figs—not olives or apples. If you plant a vine, you expect to get grapes—not figs or strawberries. The source should be dependable. We, as Christians, should be a dependable source of God's love to others—especially with our mouths. It costs us nothing other than yielding to the discipline of the Spirit.

(5/07) – Another insert from the Wiersbe bible conference notes fits here.

My tongue should be like a fountain giving forth clear water and like a tree providing rest, shade and delight. Every day find some way to compliment somebody. Real sincere appreciation is something we often take for granted. A student goes through three steps.

1. You are amazed at everything you see.
2. You are critical of the way things are done.
3. You get appreciative.

Churches are this way too. You can get used to things and forget to appreciate them. The problem is not the tongue; it is the heart. If you want to know who the really wise are, watch and see who has meekness. Meekness isn't weakness; meekness is power under control. Your tongue has power that must be controlled. Your tongue has power to hurt badly. If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, the heart of every problem is the problem in the heart. If your tongue is hurting people, it is because you have something wrong in your heart. If my tongue is destroying people, it is because the world and the flesh and the devil control my heart. Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

James 3:13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

My paraphrase—The one who is intelligent and full of understanding will demonstrate those attributes by living a life that does the things honoring to the Savior with humility and thoughtful consideration.

James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

In context here, James is discussing wisdom. He is saying that the person who is full of jealousy or envy or strife (rivalry due to ambition and selfishness--Greek) should not boast about being wise. That would be a lie. This is a person who is motivated by all the wrong reasons. He is not trying to honor God in his actions; he is out for success to keep up with the Joneses or for personal pride and status.

James 3:15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

"This wisdom" – The kind exhibited by the person in vs 14

This wisdom is not from God; it is from the realm of Satan—the world, the sin nature, like demons.

James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Jealousy and unbridled ambition and a thirst for power are surrounded by instability, disorder and confusion and every evil work. There is always someone else wanting to usurp your position. It's a constant struggle to maintain your position of status and is a constant motivation to others to want to achieve to a higher status than you have. Your position is never stable. You have to constantly be on guard. Where is the real satisfaction? Where is your peace?

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

James 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

The wisdom that comes from God is in stark contrast to this.

“pure” - free from ceremonial defilement, holy, sacred: —chaste(1), free from sin(1), innocent(1), pure(5).

“peaceable” - pacific; by implication, salutary:—peaceable.

“gentle” - appropriate, i.e. (by implication) mild:—gentle, moderation, patient.

I thought it was interesting to see some of the shades of meaning from the Greek for these words. The word *peaceable*, for instance, includes the ability to pacify and *gentle* includes an attitude of patience. *Easy to be intreated* suggests that there is no fear of reproach when approached. To be *full of mercy* implies a willingness to forgive and allow a second chance. To be full of *good fruits* implies someone who has a servant spirit and is thinking of others before himself. The person who is truly wise will show *no partiality* in sharing God’s love. We are to show just as much care and concern (if not more) for those who are needy and in trouble and unkind and selfish and filled with their own knowledge and on and on and on. Those with true wisdom are *not hypocritical*; they serve and share because of the love of God spilling over in their hearts and not for any personal publicity or advancement.

“righteousness” - equity (of character or act); specially (Christian) justification:—righteousness.

When we plant the seeds of peace by acting in such a way as to honor Jesus in our lives through unselfish love and service, we produce the fruit of righteousness, which is the natural fruit of our justification. In Christ we are presented “just as if we had never sinned” before the Father. The fruit that comes from us should consistently be that which honors the Father.