



1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 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. 3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 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. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 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. 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: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? 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 3:1-12)

We find very valuable and critically important counsel in today's devotion from James on self-control - primarily over that of the tongue. The tongue has been responsible for more murders and miseries than all of the wars and heavy artillery of years past. It has been the instigators of violence, war, famine, and treachery from the moment of exile from Eden. The figurative metaphors used by James in allusion to the tongue are just as poetic as any Shakespeare would use. James attempts to identify our weaknesses in terms to which we can readily grasp of everyday fare. Jesus spoke in Parables of things mundane that we might understand things spiritual. This is James' approach in these verses today.

Many referred to Jesus as Master while He ministered in His earthly walk, yet,

Jesus more often referred to Himself as a servant. He came to serve us, and not to be served! The spiritual definition of a master is at odds with that of the world. **1 "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."** If common soldiers are placed on the battle line with improperly maintained, and inoperable weapons, it is the Commanding Officer who will face Courts-Martial charges and not the common soldier. **"To whom much is given, much shall be required."** (paraphrase, Luke 12:48) Many seek to be in positions of leadership for the sake of pride, prestige, and honor. But the Christian, especially the Christian minister, should steer clear of such vulgar temptations. He should desire to lead for two reasons mainly: 1) because the Lord has called him to that office, and 2) because he desires to serve the people of God. Service is the mark of leadership - not prideful domineering. It is love that enables us to obedience, and it is love that informs our ability to lead others to truth.

Here is a cardinal mark of the Christian leader and elder: **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."** If we are able to master our own hearts and speech, then we are able to be leaders in the church. It is egregious enough for a member to spew out gossips and vitriol, but it is a most serious disqualification for a clergyman to speak hidden and subversive remarks to the members. It is a great temptation to express unfounded rumors as a defense against what we may feel unjust treatment from the people; but the mark of the leader, or Christian, is to be above such trivial slanders. **"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."** (1 Cor 9:27) If we can control that small rudder at the rear of the ship (the tongue) by use of the small helm, we can control the whole vessel. **3 "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body."** The horse's bit is small but able to turn a horse in the direction the rider dictates. If we had such mastery over our tongues, we could certainly master the lusts of the body.

James now reinforces his argument of the loose and indiscreet tongue. **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."** We see that James has compared the tongue to the bit in a horse's mouth, and now to the helm of the ship. May I remind the reader that words have consequences, and we are responsible for the good, or damage, that our words evoke. False boasting, instead of building the speaker up, will destroy his image in the eyes of others since truth will always emerge in due time. It is akin to false advertising of a product which falls far short of the claims of its seller. Soon, no one will purchase even quality merchandise from such an advertiser. We had best heed the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: ***"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."*** (Matt 12:34-37)

5 "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" All a small fire needs to grow is fuel and someone to fan the flames. A small match can burn down an entire forest. "Careless lips, sink battle ships" was a slogan of the Second World War. Just a careless and whispered word spoken indiscreetly could have caused the lives of many seaman. Even true words, spoken in the wrong spirit and with ill will, can result in harm. The whole person can

be destroyed by that tongue that belongs to it. 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." In the sense given in this verse, the tongue has greater potential for evil than all of the rest of the entire body. The tongue can speak great deceptions that arouse the wrath of nations. The fires that are characteristic of the tongue are those of Hell itself, and the fiery tongue belongs to that nativity itself.

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: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." It is quite alarming that every beast, except that beast of the soul (the tongue) can be tamed. It spews out poisons even from good hearts who forget their love.

9 "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." Just as the tongue is one creature that man cannot tame, there is One who is able to tame the tongue. One of my favorite commentators is Dr. Lehman Strauss. In his book, 'James your Brother' Dr. Strauss says: "While no man can tame the tongue, there is One who can. The Lord is no less able to control a lying, blaspheming, slanderous, gossiping tongue than He is to deliver the drunkard from alcohol, the gambler from the game table, the narcotics addict from drugs, or the lustful person from adultery." Who would desire to drink from a fountain that alternated in gushing forth pure water, and poisonous mixtures? It is even unnatural for a pure water spring to provide anything other than healthful waters. Many attend church every Sunday, and every Monday carry idle tales about a neighbor, or utter curses as freely as blessings. 10 "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"

12 "Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." It is as unnatural for a Righteous heart to declare lies and slander as it is for a fig tree to bear peaches. It is from the treasures of the heart that the tongue derives its nature. If the tongue is full of slanders, cursings, and reviling thoughts, then it came from a heart which is alien to Christ. The heart that belongs to Christ is full of wonderful and beautiful treasures that cannot be kept among wicked tokens of the heart.

Since we cannot attain to righteousness of our own strength, but must stand on that imputed righteousness of Christ, we must also be aware that we cannot, of our own strength, tame the tongue. But we must allow the Holy Ghost to dwell in our hearts and guard against wicked possessions there. Thereby, the Holy Ghost will certainly tame a tongue that has uttered awful obscenities.

We learn that there is a grave and solemn expectation that God imposes on all whom He has called to be teachers. It is for this reason that all of the elect of God should not aspire to that calling. It is a Calling of God. If we attempt, as novices, to teach sound doctrine and religion, what great possibilities exist for us to deceive others to the same degree that our lack of understanding has deceived us. It is a tragic and shameful fact that many new converts become the greatest instruments of propagating erroneous understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Be sure that you have well understood the Word long before you attempt to teach and correct others.