

SCRIPTURE

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2** For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. **4** Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among

our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. **7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. *ESV*

DISCUSS

1. If you were publishing this passage as an article or a blog post, what title would you give it?
2. Why do you think James wrote this? What problem was occurring that he was trying to correct?
3. Who is being "called out" by James in verse 1? Why do you think teachers will be judged with greater strictness?
4. What do you think verse 2 has to do with verse 1? Is it explaining the behavior of errant teachers, excusing them, or just generally instructing us?
5. We see the word body at the end of verse 2. That word can actually mean several different things in the New Testament. What do you think it means here?
6. How does mastery of one's speech keep the whole body in check?

7. Have you ever seen a church dispute settled by a leader who spoke wisely, clearly, and kindly? How did that happen?
8. How is the tongue like a bit in a horse's mouth? How is it like the rudder of a ship?
9. How is it like a fire?
10. Do you think these comparisons make more sense regarding individual behavior or regarding leadership of a church? Or perhaps both?
11. Do you think it's really impossible to "tame the tongue," as it says in verse 8?
12. How would a person do this? If you tried to tame your speaking habits, how would you go about it?
13. How would you describe the situation in verses 9-12? Who is James talking about? What can we guess about these people?

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Memorization: Learn James 3:9-10. This isn't your normal type of memory verse, but it might prove helpful in real-life situations.

Stop-Phrase: When you find yourself speaking badly about someone, stop—in mid-sentence if you need to. Find a phrase to run through your mind in those cases. Maybe it's James 3:9-10. Maybe it's just "This should not be." Or maybe it's a more positive statement like "Bless the Lord, O my soul" or the prayer from Psalm 19:14.

Encouragement: Think of three people you can encourage this week, and do so. Be as specific as possible. Can you bolster their confidence or their faith?

Thanks: Who has encouraged you in the past? Who has spoken words into your life that truly helped you? Can you find them and thank them for that?

Media Fast: Many of us learn unkind habits of communication from talk radio, cable news, or online videos. If this is a problem for you, engage in a "fast," abstaining from those media sources for a period of time—perhaps the next seven days. Then re-evaluate.