

PRACTICE B - SEEK TO KNOW MEANINGS

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Try to interpret the verses which you observed, following the same pattern you used in the study of James 3:6-12. Record your findings.

James 3:1-5 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

1. SELECT SOME OF YOUR KEY QUESTIONS.

HOW DOES THIS CORRESPOND TO THE GREAT COMMISSION TO MAKE DISCIPLES AND TEACH THEM? (MATTHEW 28:19-20)

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The idea of "teaching" in Matthew 28 is the assumption that Jesus' disciples would be "going" and "teaching" and "baptizing." The verb or action word in this Scripture is "make disciples." Every disciple of Christ then is a teacher in some capacity. We are to be teaching others to observe all that Jesus commanded us.

The idea in James seems to be with those with a more formal role. When you set yourself up in front of others they will be examining you and more likely to find fault with you.

WHAT KIND OF JUDGMENT IS MEANT?

This cannot be a reference to the final damning judgment of hell because that is taken care of by placing our faith in Christ.

[Romans 5:1](#) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is simply a reminder that those who stand up and teach are going to draw a lot of attention to themselves and they better be prepared for that inspection.

Paul instructed Timothy in this way too. Elders and deacons in the Church are required to have the ability to teach and be above reproach.

[1 Timothy 3:1-10](#)

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

2. DEFINE SOME OF THE KEY WORDS.

WHAT DOES BEING "PERFECT" MEAN?

Here is what Vine's says about this word:

1. **teleios** (te/leio\$, [NT:5049](#)) signifies "having reached its end" (**telos**), "finished, complete perfect." It is used (I) of persons, (a) primarily of physical development, then, with ethical import, "fully grown, mature," [1 Cor 2:6; 14:20](#) ("men"; marg., "of full age"); [Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12](#); in [Heb 5:14](#), RV, "fullgrown" (marg., "perfect"), KJV, "of full age" (marg., "perfect"); (b) "complete," conveying the idea of goodness without necessary reference to maturity or what is expressed under (a) [Matt 5:48; 19:21; James 1:4](#) (2nd part); [3:2](#). It is used thus of God in [Matt 5:48](#); (II), of "things, complete, perfect," [Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 13:10](#) (referring to the complete revelation of God's will and ways, whether in the completed Scriptures or in the hereafter); [James 1:4](#) (of the work of patience); v. [25; 18.](#), W. E.; Unger, Merrill F.; White, William, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*

3. COMPARE TRANSLATIONS.

<p>James 3 (NASU)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Tongue Is a Fire</i></p> <p>3^a Let not many of <i>you</i> become teachers, ^b my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a ¹stricter judgment. ² For we all ^astumble in many <i>ways</i>. ^bIf anyone does not stumble in ¹what he says, he is a ^cperfect man, able to ^dbridle the whole body as well. ³ Now ^aif we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and <i>yet</i> it ^aboasts of great things.</p> <p>^bSee how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ⁶ And ^athe tongue is a fire, the <i>very</i> world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which ^bdefiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of <i>our</i> ¹life, and is set on fire by ²hell. ⁷ For every ¹species of</p>	<p>(KJV)</p> <p>3 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>³ Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!</p> <p>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</p>
<p>(ESV)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Taming the Tongue</i></p> <p>3^c Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For ^dwe all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, ^e he is a perfect man, ^f able also to bridle his whole body. ³ If we put ^g 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 ^h it boasts of great things.</p> <p>How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And ⁱ the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our</p>	<p>(NIV)</p> <p>3 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.</p> <p>³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.</p>

4. STUDY CROSS-REFERENCES, NOTING ESPECIALLY LUKE 6:43-45.

I mentioned Matthew 28:19-20 above.

Luke 6:43-45 "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Here, Luke also connects conduct with our tongue but he uses the word "mouth."

5. CONSULT SOME RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE POSITION OF TEACHERS IN THE DAYS OF JAMES.

Didaskaloi

(teachers) was often used of rabbis and any who functioned in an official teaching or preaching role (cf. John 3:10), suggesting that James was speaking of the teaching office in the church (cf. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Above all else, rabbis were master teachers and were accorded great honor and respect by their fellow Jews. As reflected in the gospels, many rabbis relished their prestige and

privilege. Jesus said of the scribes and the Pharisees, many of whom were rabbis, that they "have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. . . . But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men" (Matt 23:2,5-7).

In some Jewish circles, rabbis were held in such high regard that a person's duty to his rabbi was considered greater than that to his own parents, because his parents only brought him into the life of this world, whereas his rabbi brought him into the life of the world to come. It was written that if a man's parents and his rabbi were captured by an enemy, the rabbi was to be ransomed first. Although rabbis were not allowed to take money for their services but were to support themselves with a trade, it was considered an especially pious act to take one into your house and support him in every way possible.

The self-seeking motives that characterized many rabbis were anathema to Jesus and have no place in the lives of His people. But obviously there were some among those to whom James wrote who had such motives and who desired to become teachers for the wrong reason.

Besides official rabbis, any respected Jewish man might be given opportunity to speak in a synagogue service. Although Jesus was not an official rabbi, He frequently read Scripture and gave an interpretation on the Sabbath, at least once in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:15-21,31; Matt 4:23; 9:35). Similarly, Paul and Barnabas, also not sanctioned rabbis, frequently spoke in synagogues when they visited a city (e.g., Acts 13:5,14-15; 14:1). Apparently it was also common in the early church for a mature Christian man to have opportunity to speak in a service. Paul regulated the church at Corinth by writing, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor 14:26). Throughout the history of the church, and certainly in churches today, there are many people – such as counselors, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and such – who are not called and ordained to ministry but who have a rightful contribution to make in teaching God's Word.

By giving the caution Let not many of you become teachers, James does not, of course, mean to discourage such people from communicating their scriptural insights. Nor does he want to hinder in any way those who are genuinely called by God to be official teachers of His Word. He is saying rather that those who believe they have such a divine calling should first test their faith to be sure they are saved. He has made it clear that, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless" (1:26). If that principle applies to everyone in the church, how much more does it apply to teachers who presume to stand before God's people to interpret and explain God's Word?

MacArthur, John F., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary

6. WRESTLE WITH THE MEANINGS OF SOME OF THE COMPARISONS MADE AND SUMMARIZE YOUR CONCLUSIONS.

One note I read in a commentary stated it well: "It [the tongue] is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person." MacArthur, John F., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. If you don't have that under control

then what good are you trying to teach others? The descriptions of a fire, a horse, and a ship all convey the significance of small things making a big impact. Words can be like knives. I have felt the wrath and fury of an angry person's words. They can wound for days.

I used to have a very loose tongue before I became a Christian. I would use many colorful words that profited no one. My outbursts were simply a relief valve as I sought to maintain a certain pressure within. When God took back the throne of my life my insides stabilized and that language vanished.