



THE STUMBLING TONGUE
AND THE PERFECT MAN
JAMES 3:1-12

In the beginning God created...

³ And **God said**, "Let there be light," and there was light.

⁶ And **God said**, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water."

⁹ And **God said**, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.

¹¹ Then **God said**, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees..."

¹⁴ And **God said**, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night..."

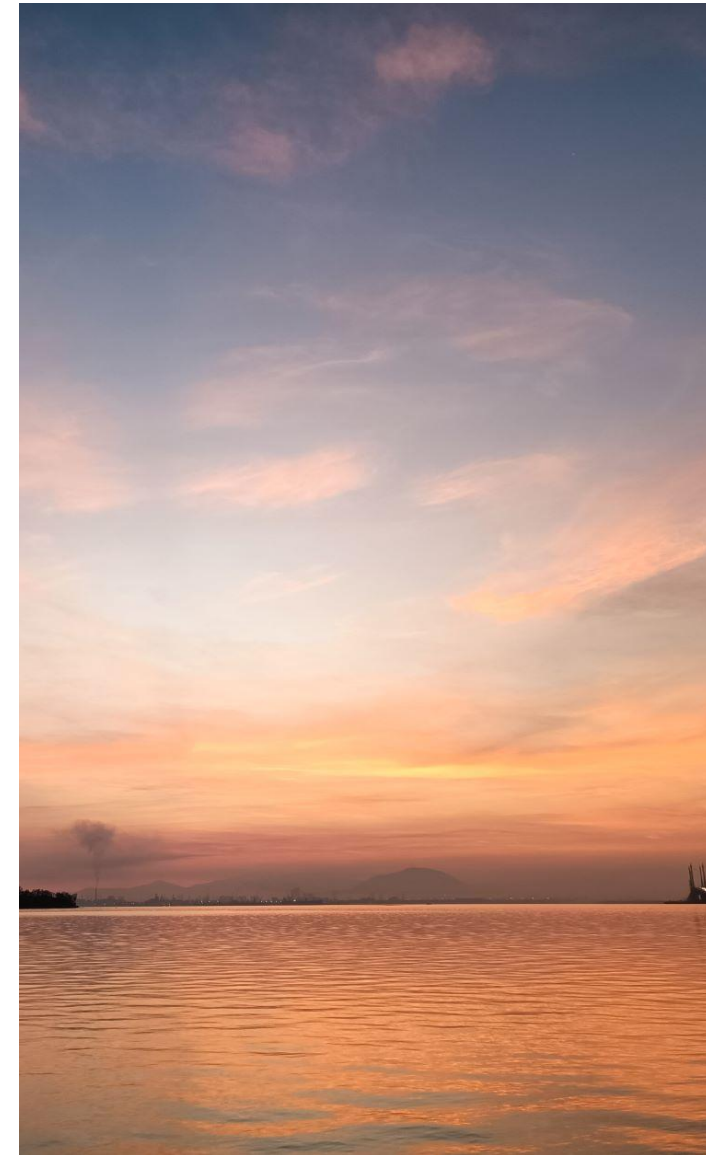
²⁰ And **God said**, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above..."

²⁴ And **God said**, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds..."

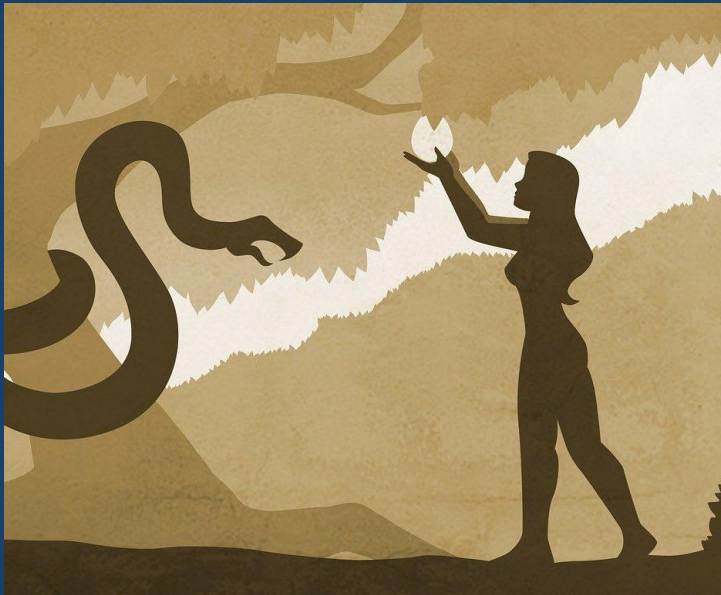
²⁶ Then **God said**, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

²⁹ Then **God said**, "I give you every seed-bearing plant..."

(Genesis 1:_ NIV)



The serpent deceived Eve – with his tongue



<https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/fall-of-eve-in-letters-of-paul-and-why-it-matters-today/>

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "**Did God really say**, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,

³ **but God did say**, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.

⁵ "**For God knows** that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:1-6 NIV)

James 3:1-5 (NIV)

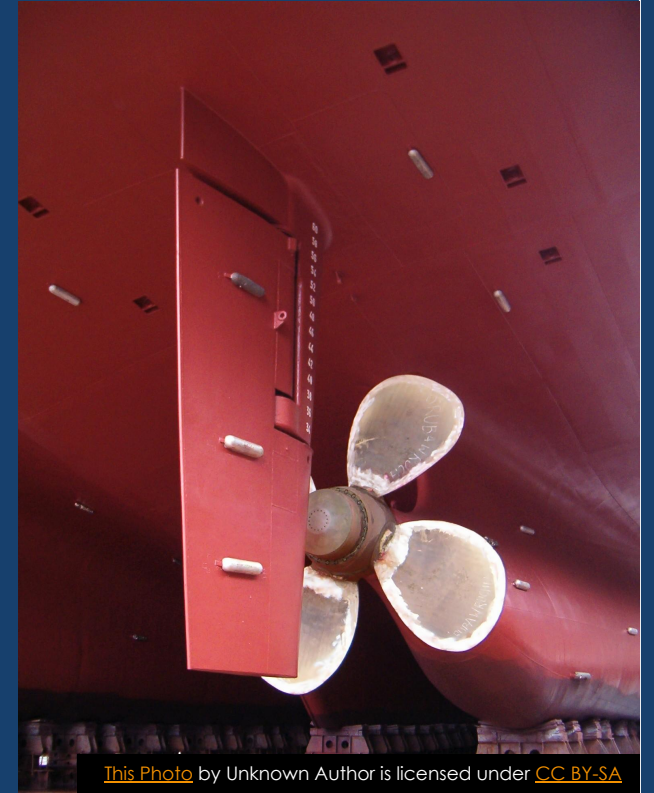
¹ Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

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.

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.



James 3:6-12 (NIV)

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.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,

⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.



The Stumbling Tongue and the Perfect Man

1. The tongue is a test of perfection of the whole man

2. The tongue corrupts a man progressively

3. The tongue cannot be tamed by man

4. The tongue is forked

The true test of a man's spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue.

– R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man

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<sup>2</sup> 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. (James 3:2 NIV)

1. The tongue is a test of perfection of the whole man

# Perfect = *teleios*

**τέλειος** *teleios* {tel'-i-os}

**Meaning:** 1) brought to its end, finished 2) wanting nothing necessary to completeness 3) perfect 4) that which is perfect 4a) consummate human integrity and virtue 4b) of men 4b1) full grown, adult, of full age, mature

- BibleWorks



# 1. The tongue is a test of perfection of the whole man

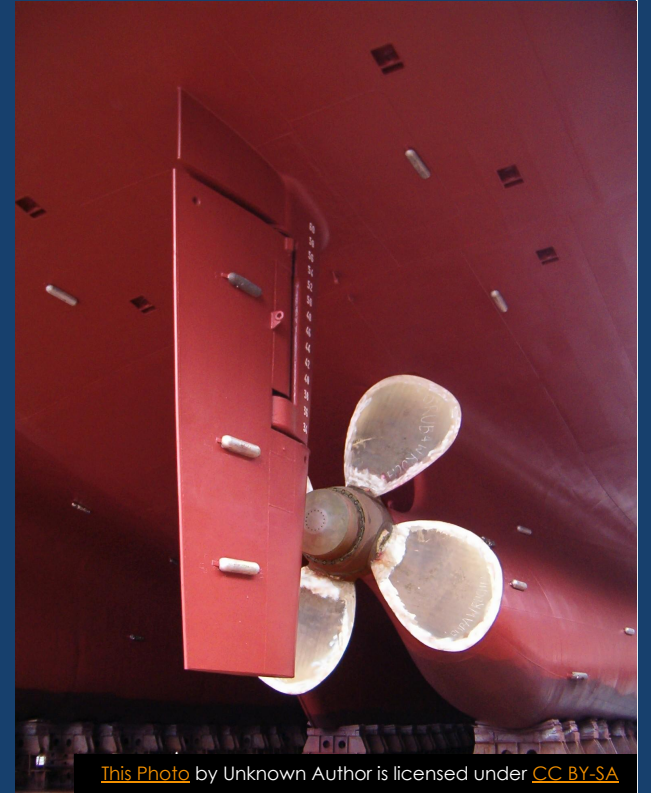
<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

<sup>2</sup> **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.

<sup>3</sup> When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

(James 3:1-4 NIV)



## 2. The tongue corrupts a man progressively

<sup>5</sup> **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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

(James 3:5-6 NIV)

## 2. The tongue corrupts a man progressively

Sow a thought, reap an action;  
sow an action, reap a habit;  
sow a habit, reap a character;  
sow a character, reap a destiny.

– 19<sup>th</sup> century writings

### 3. The tongue cannot be tamed by man

<sup>7</sup> All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,  
<sup>8</sup> but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(James 3:7-8 NIV)



# 4. The tongue is forked

<sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

<sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

<sup>11</sup> Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

<sup>12</sup> My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

(James 3:9-12 NIV)



<sup>9</sup> But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

(Jude 1:9 NIV)



[https://www.unm.edu/~davidc/pages\\_paintings/p05j\\_michael\\_saton.htm](https://www.unm.edu/~davidc/pages_paintings/p05j_michael_satan.htm)

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(James 3:9-12 NIV)



# What is the source of our problems with the tongue? How can we tame the tongue?

<sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

<sup>35</sup> The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

<sup>36</sup> But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

<sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

(Matthew 12:34-37 NIV)

**A. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks** (whether good or evil)

**= 5<sup>th</sup> point**

**B. By our words we will be judged** (whether acquitted or condemned)

**= 1<sup>st</sup> point** The tongue is a test of perfection of the whole man



## 6. If the tongue is forked, the heart also is divided

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same **spring**?

(James 3:11 NIV)

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³⁴ ...For **out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.**

³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

(Matthew 12:34-35 NIV)

The Stumbling Tongue and the Perfect Man

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5. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks
6. If the tongue is forked, the heart also is divided

Take-away #1: Purify your heart, and you will also purify your tongue



The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

(Proverbs 18:21 NIV)

Take-away #2: Use your tongue to bring life
to others

Take-aways:

1. Purify your heart, and you will also purify your tongue
2. Use your tongue to bring life to others

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Though you probe my heart  
and examine me at night,  
though you test me,  
you will find nothing;  
I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.  
(Psalm 17:3 NIV – A Prayer of David)