

August 26

Scriptures: Read James 3

Key Verse: “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2)

Overview

If, indeed, the writer of this letter was Jesus’ half-brother, then it should comfort us to hear him say, “We all stumble in many things”. James was known in Jerusalem as “a Jew of the Jews”, a man of utmost piety and devotion to the Temple. There is a long-standing tradition that he used to climb the stairs to the Temple each day on his knees. He was highly regarded and respected as an ultra-Pharisee, and there were few, if any, in Jerusalem who would say anything bad about him. He was an excellent choice as the first leader, or bishop, of the early church (see Acts 12:17; 15; 21:18). So, when James includes himself as part of “all [who] stumble”, it should encourage us to know that even the greatest of leaders has need of daily confession and repentance.

The implied message here is that even though we may have a “blameless” life, we all fail from time to time in what we say. And, as long as our tongue trips us up, we’re far from perfect. James very colourfully illustrates the power of the tongue.

A small bit turns a huge horse. A small rudder turns a huge ship — even when storm winds are blowing. A small spark starts a huge forest fire. The tongue is untamable and “full of deadly poison” (v.8). One word can literally affect a person for “the whole course of his life” (v.6).

So what can we do about it? Cut it out? Muzzle ourselves? Or, as one philosopher put it, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

Maybe the answer lies in something James has already said, “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (1:19, NIV). Let’s think before we speak.

Prayer

O Lord, You said in Your Word, “Words fitly spoken are like apples of gold in settings of silver.” You place a great importance on our words. We pray that You would put a watch on our mouths, that we might say only that which would please You. Please change us to reflect Your image.