

The Letter of James 3:1 – 12

English Standard Version (ESV)

1 ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also
2 faith apart from works is dead.

3 ^{3:1}Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers,
4 for you know that we who teach will be judged with
5 greater strictness. ²For we all stumble in many ways. And
6 if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect
7 man, able also to bridle his whole body. ³If we put bits
8 into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide
9 their whole bodies as well. ⁴Look at the ships also: though
10 they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are
11 guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the
12 pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it
13 boasts of great things.

14 How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶And
15 the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The
16 tongue is set among our members, staining the whole
17 body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on
18 fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile
19 and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by
20 mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is
21 a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our
22 Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are
23 made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come
24 blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not
25 to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same
26 opening both fresh and salt water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my
27 brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither
28 can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Read the passage through completely before looking at these questions.

Observation (What does it say):

Consider the observation questions on the back of this page. What do you notice in this passage?

- Underline any direct, literal instructions or explanations James writes.
- Circle any figurative or symbolic words he uses.
- What else do you observe in this passage?

Interpretation (What does it mean):

After observing the passage:

- Why would James use so many different illustrations?
- How does his figurative language relate to his literal or direct statements?
- Which of his illustrations do you find most helpful? Why?
- Which of his illustrations do you find least helpful? Why?
- What questions come to mind as you read?
- How would you title this passage?

Application (What does it mean for me):

- How would you answer the criticism that “you can’t take the Bible literally”? What does “literal” mean in your understanding?
- Where do you “stumble in many ways”? What part does your speech play in that stumbling?
- Which of the illustrations James uses sounds the most like your tongue? How might that illustration help you “bridle” your tongue?

For additional thought and discussion:

For more suggested methods of study: <http://www.goodnotsafe.com/methodical-bible-study/>

For examples of inductive studies: <http://www.goodnotsafe.com/inductive-bible-study-examples-2/>

Inductive Bible Study

(A few general ideas)

Observation (What does it say?)

What facts do you **observe** about the passage that help bring out the writer's thought process?

- Who are the people involved?
- What action takes place?
- What type of literature is it (poetry, history, didactic, etc.)?
- What details are included or left out?
- Are any unusual words used?
- Is there symbolic language?
- What is the grammar of the passage (pronouns, prepositions, verb tenses)?
- Are words or ideas repeated?
- Any comparisons or contrasts?
- Any cause and effect?
- Are there indications of purpose ("in order that...")?
- Are there conclusions ("Therefore...")?
- Are there explanations?
- Does the passage logically break into sections?
- How would you summarize the passage?
- What would be a good "headline" for the passage?

Interpretation (What does it mean?)

What questions come to mind about the facts that would help you **interpret** the meaning?

- How would the original readers have understood the passage?
- What is the main emphasis?
- Why does the writer use repetition, or contrast, or unusual words?
- What does the grammar or structure of the passage reveal about the writer's thought pattern?
- Is there a logical sequence in the passage?
- How are different ideas in the passage connected?
- Are there any new ideas or concepts presented?
- Are there difficulties in the passage?

Application (What does it mean for me?)

What is the impact on your life? What **application** does the Holy Spirit want to show you?

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a promise to be thankful for?
- Is there an attribute of God to worship?
- Is there an example to follow?

**Read nothing into the Scriptures,
but draw everything from them,
and suffer nothing to remain
hidden that is really in them.
J.A. Bengel (1687-1752)**

For a much more detailed description of the methodology, see

Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*. Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1952.

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