

22. Principle: The believer is like the horse who follows his mouth. What the tongue of the believer says, reveals the content of his soul.

**James 3:3** Now if we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. (NASB)

1. The verse begins with the conditional conjunction **εἰ (ei)**: “if” which is a first-class condition confirming the statement in context is true. It is followed by the continuative particle **δέ (dé)**: “now.”
2. The example James presents is the tacking of a horse beginning with the bit, a part of the bridle mentioned in verse 2. This bit is going to be put into the horse’s mouth. The verb “put” is the present active indicative of **βάλλω (ballō)**. This is a customary present which indicates that the action occurs regularly. The horseman always starts by inserting the bit into the horse’s mouth.
3. The bit is among the things that influence the horse. There are other techniques having to do with how one sits in the saddle, the use of the legs and feet to apply pressure, hand movements on the withers, etc.
4. These techniques enable the rider to control the horse. The use of the reins directs the horse in the way the rider would have him go. How he rides the horse can be as effective in guiding the animal as do the reins.
5. These techniques result in training the horse how to “obey the rider.” The verb “obey” is the present middle infinitive of **πείθω (peithō)**. There are several applications of this verb including “persuade, convince, or induce.” Here it is best translated, “to obey.”
6. The middle voice indicates that the horse makes the volitional decision to obey while the infinitive associates the horse’s obedience with the influence of the bit.
7. The bit’s influence results in the horse’s entire body obeying as well. A little bit in the small corner of his mouth controls the entire body of the horse. It is from that small device in that small corner that enables the rider to control the horse’s entire body.
8. As we have learned in our analysis, a person who is able to communicate with a horse in the horse’s language can make friends with him. Once the horse learns to trust the person, he can be controlled by that person’s body language.



9. This camaraderie can lead the horse to accepting the person as a rider, even bareback. But communication by the rider with the horse must extend to management of the horse while mounted.
10. That relationship is abnormal. According to what is normal requires training but with the assistance of bit and bridle. Even then the horse's tendency is to go where he wants to go. Only the bit can change his mind about that.
11. These tendencies clearly indicate that the horse has volition and until he is convinced otherwise, he will go his own way. The bit is what trains a horse to do what his rider demands, and he will respond accordingly every time.
12. Consequently, he is trained to obey because he obeys his mouth's reaction to pain. Whatever direction he has a mind to go can be quickly changed by pulling on a rein. The rider with a rein directs the horse in the way he should go.
13. The word for this in the NASB is "direct," the present active indicative of the verb **μετάγω (metágō)**: "to direct or bring from one direction to another, to guide (lead to another place)."<sup>1</sup>
14. "Direct" is a good translation because to change the horse's mind to go in another direction requires the infliction of pain and he uses his volition to make the exchange from pain to comfort.
15. The bit and bridle control the body of the horse; one's inventory of ideas controls the body of the human. The horse uses his volition to comply with the wishes of the rider. The human uses his volition to comply with the wishes of his sin nature or the standards of his culture.
16. The human can use the bit and reins to control the horse since he follows his tender mouth. According to James, the believer follows his mouth because what he says is the expression of his inventory of ideas.
17. And when the tongue of the believer is unbridled with no self-imposed bit to tone it down, what he says exposes into the clear light of day the content of his soul.
18. Therefore, what a person says is the real indicator of what he thinks and the more he talks the more he exposes who he really is.
19. Bits in the horses' mouths allow their riders to train them to obey. Volition in consultation with the conscience, which is the soul's means of accessing what he thinks, is how a believer controls his entire body.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, "μετάγω," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 638.



20. In the wild, horses communicate with each other through body language. If you understand their body language, then you have insight into how they think. When you learn how to present your body to a horse, you can make friends with him and with that knowledge train him.
21. I think an excerpt from a horse expert best illustrates this principle:

I looked through binoculars at a herd of wild horses. They seemed close enough to touch. I could see subtle shifts of their eyes, ears, tongue. These were pure movements, untainted by human intervention. That day I would watch for eight continuous hours.

And then I saw an extraordinary sequence of events. A light bay [reddish brown and black mane and tail] colt was behaving badly. He was about twenty months old, I guessed, with a vast amount of feathering around his fetlocks and down the backs of his legs, and a mane running down well below his neckline. He took a run at a filly and gave her a kick. The filly cowered and hobbled off, and the colt looked pleased with himself.

Then he committed another crime. A little foal [one less than a year old] approached him, moving his mouth in a suckling action to indicate he was no threat but subservient. Just a foal. That cut no ice with the colt; he launched himself at this younger cousin and took a bite out of the foal's backside. The bay colt was a terrorist. Immediately after the attack, he pretended nothing had happened; he went neutral, as though trying to avoid blame. (pp. 19–20)

Each time he behaved badly, the dun [grayish-yellow coat with black mane and tail] mare—the matriarch—weaved a little closer to him. I became certain that she was watching for any more of this behavior. She showed no apparent sign of interest, but she had left her station and was edging closer to him all the time.

The mare witnessed about four such episodes before she finally made her move. Now she stood within twenty yards. Still, the cream-colored colt could not help himself: he launched at a grown mare, grabbed the nape of her neck, and bit down hard.

The dun mare did not hesitate. In an instant she went from neutral to full-blown anger; she pinned her ears back and ran at him, knocking him down. As he struggled to his feet, she whirled and knocked him down again. While this chastisement unfolded, the other members apparently took no notice.



The dun mare ended by driving the colt 300 yards from the herd and left him there, alone. Amazed, I tried to fathom what I was seeing. The mare took up a position on the edge of the herd to keep him in exile. She kept her eyes on his and faced up to him. She was freezing him out.

It terrified the colt to be left alone. For a flight animal, this was tantamount to a death sentence; the predators will get any horse long separated from the group. He walked back and forth, his head close to the ground, several times executing this strange, uncomfortable gait. It looked like a sign of obedience, similar to a human's bow. Returning to her post on the edge of the herd, she kept her body square on his, and never took her eye off him. (pp. 20–21)

He stood there, and I noticed a lot of licking and chewing going on, although with all this drama he had eaten nothing. I remembered the foal and how he had snapped his mouth in an obvious signal of humility, as though he were saying, "I'm not a threat to you." Was this colt now saying the same thing to his matriarch?

By this time, it was getting dark, and I would have to get back to the other horses. I wanted the moon bright that night; I wanted desperately to see how the tale would end. My intention was to camp there and continue observing the dialogue between mare and colt. (p. 21)

It was educational to watch the matriarch disciplining young, adolescent horses because so much happened. The youthful energy and inexperience of the gang of adolescents drove them to make mistakes, much like the young of any species. (p. 23)

Often like a child, the colt would reoffend immediately after being let back in, to test the disciplinary system and to gain back lost ground. He might fight another colt or bother the fillies. The dun mare came right back and disciplined him again. Each time he sinned she drove him out and kept him out before letting him back in and welcoming him into the group with extensive grooming. The third time he sinned, he practically owned up and exited by himself, grumbling about it but accepting his fate. (pp. 23–24)

Then, finally, his teenage rebellion ceased. Now cloyingly sweet, he had become a positive nuisance, wandering about and asking every horse, "Do you need any grooming?" when all they wanted was to be left alone to eat.



For four days the dun mare had made the education of this awful brat her number-one priority, and it had paid off.

As I watched the mare's training procedures with this adolescent and others, I began to understand the language she used, and it was exciting to recognize the exact sequence of signals that would pass between her and the younger horses. It really was a language—predictable, discernable, and effective. (p. 24)

I learned that in the equine universe, every degree of a horse's movement has a reason. Nothing is trivial, nothing is to be dismissed. A horse raised alone, I know now, will speak Equus: genetics imparts much of the language. A mustang raised in the wild in a herd, on the other hand, displays as pure a form of the equine tongue as I could have hoped to find anywhere. (pp. 24–25)

I would learn, much later, while starting horses in a round pen, a rich code of signs and subsigns. Keeping my mouth closed invited the horse's discomfort, opening it slightly was fine. Opening a fist on the side of my body away from the horse drew him in, while opening a fist close to him sent him away. Fingers open stirred one response, fingers closed another. Hands above my head with fingers splayed provoked true panic. Whether I am moving, standing still, facing the horse, or away: all this matters as the horse reads my body language and I read his. I can now enumerate about one hundred or more signs the horse will respond to, and the vocabulary is still growing.

The key ingredient in the equine language is the positioning of the body and its direction of travel. The attitude of the body relative to the long axis of the spine and the short axis: this is critical to their vocabulary. It *is* their vocabulary. (p. 25)

When the dun mare squared up and faced the colt, she was holding up a Keep Out sign. If she showed him part of her long axis, he could begin to consider returning to the herd. But before she would say, "I forgive you," he had to say, "I'm sorry." If the colt paced with his nose close to the ground, then he was asking for a chance to end his isolation and to renegotiate his position with her. He was saying, "I am obedient, and I am willing to listen." If he showed her the long axis of his body, then he was offering vulnerable areas to her and asking to be forgiven. (pp. 25–26)



Their eye contact spoke volumes. When she was holding him out there, she always kept one eye directly on his, sometimes for uncomfortably long periods of time. When her eye slid a short distance off his, he knew he might be allowed back in. I came to realize how subtle was this reading of eye contact.

In time, I would grasp just how exact a language it was. There were precise messages, whole phrases and sentences that always meant the same thing, always had the same effect. (p. 26)

Perhaps, it occurred to me, I could use the same silent system of communication myself. If I understood how to do it, I could effectively crossover the boundary between human (the ultimate fight animal) and horse (the flight animal). Using their language, their system of communication, I could create a strong bond of trust. I would achieve cross-species communication.<sup>2</sup> (p. 27)

22. Horses have a language. It is precise, standard, and universal. Those who can speak the equine language are able to communicate with horses and the two can work together to accomplish wonderful results together in various applications.
23. Likewise, the human race has a language, in fact many languages. But what is universal among them is, regardless of the tongue or dialect, the ability to communicate is unique to Homo sapiens.
24. Although the equine language is visual, the human language is primarily spoken or written. It is the use of the language that communicates ideas, principles, and standards. For believers, the communication conveys the thinking of God to the positive-volition believer.
25. The horse maintains unity among the herd because of its silent language. The human race, because of the absence of organized thought among them, is in constant turmoil—because they are able to develop many differences of opinion and as a result they remain in constant conflict.
26. The power that enables some to achieve unity of thought is subscription to the absolute truth that is contained in the text of the immutable Word of God.

**Romans 12:2** Stop being molded to this age, but be transformed by the renovation of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, namely the good, the well-pleasing, and the complete.

<sup>2</sup> Monty Roberts, *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 19–21, 23–27.



**Romans 12:3** I say through the grace which has been given to me to everyone who is among you to stop thinking in terms of arrogance beyond what you ought to think; but think in terms of sanity for the purpose of being rational without illusion as God has assigned to each one of us a standard of thinking from doctrine. (EXT)

20. Here is the expanded translation of our exegesis of James 3:2–3:

**James 3:2** We all commit many sins. If anyone does not sin in what he says, that same person is a mature nobleman, able because of doctrine to control the entire body with his volition.

**v. 3** Now if we push the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we change the direction of their entire body. (EXT)

Principles:

1. Horses are large animals whose order is maintained within the herd by a silent but visual language.
2. Once this language is understood, man is able to control them by both visual communication and by bits in their mouths.
3. The bridle's bit enables the horseman to control the animal's entire body. By application, it is doctrine that is able to control the entire body of the believer.
4. Just as the horse is much stronger than a man, the man is able to control him by use of the bit against his tender mouth.
5. Likewise, the believer follows his mouth so that what he says reveals the content of his soul and therefore communicates who he really is.
6. If the tongue is to be controlled, then there must be an inventory of working objects in the soul to accomplish that objective.
7. The tongue is a part of the physical body, but it is manipulated by the soul and the content of its stream of consciousness.

8. If the stream of consciousness is dominated by concepts of human viewpoint, human good, and evil, then this is what will be communicated by the tongue.
9. If the stream of consciousness is dominated by concepts of divine viewpoint, divine good, and divine rationales, then the tongue will express those ideas.
10. In this way, the believer, over time, will be able to exchange human viewpoint for divine viewpoint through the accumulation of a doctrinal inventory of ideas.
11. This inventory contains the accumulation of working objects to which his faith is able recall and then apply.
12. In verses 2 and 3, the illustration given by James is an animal, a horse, who is controlled by the small bit in his mouth. Its influence determines which direction his rider desires to go.
13. The human tongue is a reliable resource to discern what is going on in a believer's soul. If it is dominated by human viewpoint, this will be revealed by what he says.
14. If divine viewpoint, it will be revealed by what he says. No one can express anything beyond what is retained in his stream of consciousness.
15. Verse 2 indicates this by the phrase, "If anyone does not sin in what he says, that same person is a mature nobleman, able because of doctrine to control the entire body with its volition."
16. This man's stream of consciousness contains a high inventory of doctrinal ideas from which this "nobleman" is able to consult and express those ideas in what he says.
17. Without working objects facilitated in the soul, the believer is incapable of expressing divine viewpoint and remains unable to control his body beginning with his tongue.
18. James does not stop at verses 2 and 3 with his dissertation on soul inventory. In these two verses his example is the small bit in the mouth of a horse which allows his rider to control him to go where he wants to go.
19. In verse 4, James goes with an inanimate example, the rudder of a ship while in verse 5 he uses the example of the combustion of a forest set aflame by a small fire.
20. We now proceed in James 3 with:



**James 3:4** 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. (NASB)

1. This verse begins with imperative mood #23, the aorist middle imperative of ὁράω (*horáō*), which captures our attention.
2. The command is for the reader to consider another example, “Look at the ships!” The word for ship is the noun πλοῖον (*plōion*), “a rather large sea-faring ship.”<sup>3</sup>
3. The New Testament contains several references to boats and ships, the former on lakes and the latter on seas, especially the latter on which Paul sailed in Acts 27 and 28.
4. Paul was in the custody of Julius, a Roman centurion, who was commissioned to bring Paul to Rome for a hearing before Caesar. Also, on board was Luke who chronicled the mission, noted in Acts 27:1–28:16. At the city of Myra in Lycia, the three men booked passage on a corn ship bound for Rome:  

**The size of the vessel is indicated by the fact that there were 276 persons on board, crew and passengers all told (Acts 27:37). Luke has made no note of the name of this vessel.**
5. The ship to which James refers was among those common in the Graeco-Roman world. The ships of the first century had a high bow that came down into the deck and had a number of masts including the main mast.
6. The rudders were quite small by comparison to the size of the ship, described in the verse as “so great,” the adjective τηλικοῦτος (*tēlikoútos*): “so vast, so mighty, so large.”
7. The ship was “driven by strong winds” caught by its several sails. The word “strong” is the adjective σκληρός (*sklēros*): “fierce, violent.” In our study of the passage referenced in Acts above, we were able to identify this incidence as a Mediterranean hurricane.
8. There are not much sails and rudders can do in managing the wave and wind action of a hurricane, but together they cooperate to propel the ship forward.

<sup>3</sup> Bauer, “πλοῖον,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3d ed., 830.



9. Absent these impediments, the rudder's task was to direct the ship along a course to Rome. Like the horse, the ship is a very large, seagoing vessel, but it is incapable of maintaining an assigned course without a rudder.
10. Here is an example of what happens when a ship loses one of its screws [ the propellers of a ship]:

A thing need not be physically large in order to be important. The degree of control which the rudder exerts upon the course of a great ship is disproportionate to its size. The ship goes in the direction dictated by the impulse of the man at the helm. The starboard screw on a 19,000 ton ocean liner broke off in the mid-Atlantic. The captain, en route to Europe, immediately ordered that the speed be reduced to eight knots, even though it meant that the ship would be a week late in Southampton. He explained that the loss of the starboard screw resulted in a torque effect which would drive the ship in a circle to the right. The rudder would be used to hold against the force of the torsion and thus keep the ship on course, but only at a reduced speed. Otherwise the strain on the rudder could snap it, in which case the ship would be helpless and could only wait for a rescue tug to come out of England and tow it to port. We limped in to Amsterdam with the loss of a week from a summer's study tour. Later that summer we saw the ship in dry dock in Amsterdam and were able to appreciate how small the rudder was in comparison to the ship.<sup>4</sup>

11. James's illustrations of the bit (v. 3), the rudder (v. 4), and the flame (v. 5) stress what appears to be small and insignificant but the absence of the first two results in the cause of great disorder while the presence of the third has the same result.
12. The human body is quite large by comparison to the organ of the tongue, but when used by a believer without reference to the working objects of doctrine in the soul, it causes spiritual disorder among those affected by it.
13. As is noted above, ships are driven by strong winds which fill the sails, but the ship goes in whatever direction the wind blows unless it is "directed by a very strong rudder."

**(End JAS3-20. See JAS3-21 for continuation of study at p. 201.)**

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<sup>4</sup> Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament: James et al.* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Co., 1985), 16:561-62.

