

Despite the limited size, the tongue has extraordinary power (vv. 3–5a); its devastating power is not only to be compared to that of fire—it is itself a disastrous fire (vv. 5b, 6a ... which, as long as it leads an untamed life of its own, draws the body, i.e., the whole person further into a worldly snare as it corrupts the person (v. 6c; cf. 1:27).³

James will use the word **γλῶσσα** four times in chapter 3: **(1)** in verses 5, “the tongue is a small part of the body,” **(2)** in verse 6, “the tongue is a fire” and “the tongue is set among its members as that which defiles the whole body,” and **(3)** in verse 8, “no one can tame the tongue.” (NASB)

The reason this small member of the body is going to be the subject of an entire chapter is because of the destruction it causes. Generally speaking, you never know who a person really is if he never says anything. What he truly believes is retained inside his stream of consciousness.

Overt behavior and habits are physical and often give some insight, but Solomon informs us in Proverbs 23:7, “as he thinks within himself, so he is.” The tongue is the physical means by which a person reveals his inner thoughts.

The inventory of a person’s soul is in constant flux, progressing either positively or negatively. There are categories of information that define who a person really is and may be summed up briefly by the presence or absence of honor, integrity, loyalty, rectitude, and probity.

If these attributes are well-developed, then the individual is positive to the foundational standards of his culture. However, cultures are varied. What is honorable in one nation would not be so in another.

Therefore, a culture can be honorable or dishonorable. What distinguishes the honorable from the dishonorable is orientation and adjustment to biblical guidance. When standards are based on divine guidance, then a culture will provide maximum liberty to its citizens.

In our constitutional republic, each citizen is free to use his Law of Liberty to make whatever choice he desires as long as he submits to principles of establishment viewpoint.

The choices available are numerous and varied and each individual may freely pursue one or many of them. Among these is the provision by the Law of Liberty that, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

³ Gerhard Dautzenberg, “γλῶσσα,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 1:252.



The Law of Liberty permits every individual to freely exercise his “religion” of choice, or not. Among those that may be selected is Christianity.

No one is born a Christian. Every person enters this world as a heathen, goy, infidel, barbarian, or in general, an unbeliever. However, under the Law of Liberty, each is free to subscribe to a “religion,” or not.

The difference between Christianity and religions is that the former is based on truth, **ἀλήθεια** (*alētheia*), divine revelation, as opposed to human viewpoint which is the foundation of all religions.

Groups that assume the title of Christian are often functioning as a religion, some subtle, others overt. Many who follow denominational teachings have a flawed foundation since they promote the acquisition of salvation through a system of human works.

Those who follow extra-biblical teachings, include the Mormons’ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This “religion” is involved in heresy, elevating its “scriptures,” concocted by Joseph Smith in the mid-twentieth century, as superior to biblical revelation. They include *The Book of Mormon*, *Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrines and Covenants*.

To distinguish between biblical Christianity and deviations from it, requires serious study of the Word of God. Application of biblical standards is dependent upon each individual’s willingness to reference doctrine learned as the working object for application to life and circumstances. Otherwise, absent an inventory of doctrinal truth, forces believers to use human viewpoint instead of divine guidance.

Therefore, the undergirding support, the immutable power, and the unadulterated veracity of Scripture is the only resource a person may consult for absolute truth and only the spirit-filled believer has access to it.

When this perfectly recorded resource is ignored, then mankind is left to flounder with human rationales offered by *cosmos diabolicus* in a futile search for what this world does not have and thus cannot offer. Scripture is the only repository of truth and only those motivated to study it can acquire it.

Believers are incapable of learning and applying the Bible’s repository of truth without serious study of its teachings. Failure to advance or failure to apply truth to life and circumstances results in the consistent indulgence in personal sin and the performance of human good and evil.

James addresses one of the obvious expressions of this deficiency by his diatribe against verbal sin. The tongue is the resource that transfers carnal attitudes of the soul into verbal expressions. This small part of the body is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

The Antidote for Verbal Sin

John 8:31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed in Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

v. 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

This passage is a key to understanding James 3. What James addresses is the breakdown within the souls of those who attend his church in Jerusalem. Out of fellowship, sins of the tongue lash out at one another with scathing vitriol that destroys the environment for learning.

Until this monster is brought under control, truth will never gain access to the souls of the parishioners. As a result, they can never truly be disciples of the Lord.

Jesus begins verse 3:1 by addressing believers. He gives instructions on how they may successfully advance as His disciples. It begins with an “if” clause of a third-class condition, **ἐάν (eán)**: uncertainty of fulfillment but still likely.

What is uncertain, but still likely, is that these believers will “continue in My Word,” the aorist active subjunctive of **μένω (ménō)**. Some of those gathered will continue in studying His Word, but some will not.

The verb, *ménō* means, “to abide, to persist, remain.” It contains the idea of staying with the obligation to grow in grace regardless of the circumstances.

The aorist tense of *ménō* refers to spiritual growth occurring during one’s physical life. The active voice emphasizes the volitional requirement to stay the course without prolonged deviation from the spiritual walk. However, the subjunctive mood indicates some of those being addressed will not stay the course.

That in which they are being challenged to persist is, “in My Word”: **ἐν τῷ λόγῳ (en tō lógos)**. Those who consistently persist in growing in grace by studying His Word will produce the following objective: “you are truly My disciples.”

The word “truly” is the adverb **ἀληθῶς (alēthōs)**. Some may claim to be disciples of the Lord, but those who “continue in My Word” are certainly disciples of Mine.

The noun “disciples” in the Greek is, μαθητής (mathētēs): One who is constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, disciple, adherent.⁴

⁴ Walter Bauer, “μαθητής,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.



Jesus is the ultimate Professor of divine truth whose particular set of views are classified as immutable, the result of His teachings which are confirmed in the next verse. Those *mathētaí* who continue their studies in the Divine Academy of Grace Didactics are guaranteed consistent inculcation of the truth.

The Lord's comments continue in verse 32, "and you will know," the predictive future middle indicative of the verb, **γινώσκω (*ginōskō*)**: "to arrive at a knowledge of something, i.e., the truth."⁵ This refers to the process of comprehension by means of studying which demands mental-attitude discipline to stay the course.

The only way a believer can make the constant advance in the acquisition of divine thought is under the filling, teaching, and inculcation ministry of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a haphazard process. It is the consistent, ongoing dedication of plugging away, day in, day out. Vocabulary is developed, principles are learned, doctrines are categorized, and truth can be applied. The content of what is acquired in the soul is said by the Lord to be "truth," the singular noun, **ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*)**.

In His conversation with Pontius Pilate, our Lord said to him in:

John 18:37b "I have come into the world to testify to the truth [**ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*)**]. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

v. 38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth [(***alētheia***)]?"

Jesus' mission in the Incarnation was to "testify to the truth," in other words, to demonstrate the thinking, decision-making, and lifestyle that emanated from an inventory of absolute truth in the soul of a human being. Pilate, who existed in the environment of the Roman Empire knew that truth in his environment was a very flexible thing.

Contrarily, Jesus pointed out in John 8:32 that, "you will comprehend the truth by continuing to study My Word." He completes verse 32 with the statement, "and the truth will make you free."

Alētheia, or "truth," is knowledge that finds its origin in and emanates from the divine attributes of omniscience and veracity:

Omniscience: God is wise. He knows perfectly and eternally all that is knowable, whether actual or merely possible. God is absolute truth expressed by His integrity. (p. 286)

⁵ Ibid., 199.

Veracity: God is absolute truth, the expression of His integrity (John 8:32). God does not hold the truth as being something He acquired; He *is* the truth from eternity past. In veracity, God honors Bible doctrine resident in the soul of the believer. God honors His Word wherever it is found.⁶ (pp. 291, 292)

When the believer acquires information from the Bible under the mentorship of the Holy Spirit, a cognitive learning process occurs. The end result is Cognitive Truth:

In God, truthfulness stems from omniscience, so that the attribute of truth refers in part to His perfect knowledge. Since He is creator, whatever we know depends on Him. All truth is God's truth. Truth-for-man is still in the making, but truth-for-God is complete.

To know Him is to know the omniscient source of all knowledge—not to know all He knows, but to understand how wisdom and knowledge are at all possible.

The faithful messenger speaks the truth from God, and in responding to the truth the believer accordingly trusts the God from whom the message comes.⁷

The Lord summed up His comments in John 8:32 with the clause, “The truth will make you free,” which is one word in the Greek, the predictive future active indicative of **ἐλευθερώω** (*eleutheróō*).

The verb *eleutheróō* means to be free. It is two phased. First of all, faith alone in Christ alone liberates the believer from the power and punishment of sin. Once saved, freedom refers to the process of growing in grace and acquiring an inventory of divine truth with which he can serve the Lord.

The principle that emerges from this is that the believer is vindicated by the acquisition of truth by which he becomes a good soldier for Christ in the scrum of the Angelic Conflict.

The future tense of *eleutheróō* is prophetic for application in the Church Age. Knowledge of truth frees the believer to serve the Lord.

⁶ R. B. Thieme, Jr., “Appendix A: The Doctrine of Divine Essence,” in *The Integrity of God*, 4th ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2005), 291, 292.

⁷ A. M. Ross, “Truth: Ontological Truth,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 5:828.



The active voice indicates that by acquisition of truth the believer enjoys increasing freedom to serve the Lord. The indicative mood indicates the reality of this principle:

The only infallible resource for absolute truth is found in the Word of God. Acquisition of its inventory of truth increases over time through spiritual growth. The believer's freedom to serve the Lord increases in association with his inculcation of truth in his soul.

There are principles that are recognized in the fallen environment of the devil's world that are independent of those contained in Scripture. Humanity has the tendency to impute to many of them the title of "settled law" meaning that it is to be accepted as "truth." This conclusion is reached by human viewpoint.

Yet, as time passes, what was previously referred to as "truth," or "settled law," is replaced by another discovery which receives the transfer of those accolades.

What Scripture provides is an inventory of divine viewpoint which is confirmed by the veracity of divine omniscience and is regarded as immutable fact and accepted as absolute truth.

Not only is this truth available to every believer, they are all challenged to delve into serious study of the Word of God. The mission is to become witnesses for the Prosecution. Every believer is free to use his spiritual assets to acquire an inventory of divine thought.

Unfortunately, there are those who, although saved, imitate the life of the unbeliever. In John 8, Jesus is in a conversation with the Pharisees, unbelieving Jews who considered themselves esteemed theologians.

These self-aggrandized men were enslaved by human viewpoint and although revered in the community were in fact slaves to the lie. The Lord expresses the reason this is true in:

John 8:43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My Word.

v. 44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth [ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*)] because there is no truth [*ouk alētheia*] in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.



John 8:45 “But because I speak the truth
[*alétheia*], you do not believe Me.

The problem that James is addressing in his church in Jerusalem is the absence of truth in the souls of some and the rejection of truth in the souls of others. For this reason, the entirety of James, chapter three, addresses this issue which is expressed by sins of the tongue.

Since this is true, it means these believers have not developed an efficient inventory of doctrine because they have not made the personal effort to pursue truth. James is teaching the truth yet those in his congregation were not responding to it. Why?

Because they rejected truth, they failed to develop an edification complex of the soul. This refers to the system of spiritual growth which includes steady advance from basic, to secondary, and finally an advanced inventory of truth in the *kardía*.

This requires positive response to biblical instruction from a qualified pastor-teacher. This is the process by which spiritual maturity is attained and would resolve the situation James confronts in his church.

This doctrine amplifies the power biblical truth provides and with such an inventory, believers are able to not only continue their spiritual advance but encourage others to join them.

If what the Bible teaches is absolutely true and is the antidote for the lie, if knowing the truth enables the believer to build an inventory of truth by which he can make good decisions from a position of strength, then its system of learning needs to be reviewed before we engage the problems James addresses in chapter three.

Therefore, we now take up the doctrine of the Edification Complex of the Soul.

Doctrine of the Edification Complex of the Soul

Introduction: Definition of Terms.

1. Edify:

1. To build, construct (a dwelling, edifice). 2b. To work up or fashion materials into a building or structure. 2c. To build up, fashion, organize (a system, institution, or law, a moral quality), to establish or strengthen a person. 2e. To take form, grow; also, to prosper, achieve success. 3. In religious use: to build up (the church, the soul) in faith and holiness; to benefit spiritually; to strengthen, support.

