

22. The Law of Freedom refers to the volition of the individual. What enables the believer to use that freedom to make honorable choices he must have working objects of biblical truth in his stream of consciousness.
23. Whereas God's love is the composite of his righteousness, justice, and omniscience, the human's development of personal integrity is dependent upon biblical principles to inform his decision-making.
24. For the believer, the attribute of love is dependent upon an inventory of righteousness standards in his soul. However, ignorance of the entire inventory of righteous standards limits his ability to make consistently good decisions.
25. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. The believer must use his conscience to determine from what he knows to decide how to apply from his inventory of ideas.
26. God honors the good intention of the decision, but He cannot approve of a bad decision. In His grace He allows poor decisions and their ramifications to serve as guidance toward a better choice down the road.
27. For that strategy to be continuously aggrandized, he must devote the time and the concentration to constantly grow in grace. In doing so his conscience become increasingly empowered to make good decisions from that advancing inventory.
28. It is difficult enough to accumulate the whole realm of biblical mandates and guidance for the positive believer. It is impossible for the disinterested believer to do so.
29. Therefore, the ignorant believer is subject to the whims of his sin nature, his inventory of personal opinions and his concepts of right and wrong from a doctrinal inventory too ill-informed to give clarity to his decision-making.
30. This describes the person James refers to in verse 6 as someone whose tongue defiles his entire body.
31. The tongue is one of the smallest organs in the body. But when linked with the sparse content of truth in his stream of consciousness it results in the ill-informed soul controlling his entire body.
32. And James is just getting warmed up. He continues his diatribe by contending that his unbridled tongue, his rudderless tongue, "sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell."
33. This is a condemnation of a person whose verbal accusations have resulted in earning him a dreadful spiritual critique.

(End JAS3-25. See JAS3-26 for continuation of study at p. 251.)



34. We now resume our study of James 3:6 which so far reads as follows:

James 3:6a The tongue is a fire, from the cosmic systems of arrogance and hatred; the tongue is placed in the structure of our anatomy as that which contaminates the entire body ... (EXT)

35. The verse ends with two more ramifications by the sinful use of the tongue: it "... sets on fire the course of our life, and it is set on fire by hell." This is not a good situation report.
36. We start out by observing the phrase that the tongue "sets on fire" but which is actually one word, the present active participle of the verb, **φλογίζω (phlogízō)**: "to set on fire, to ignite, incite, or inflame."
37. Paul's illustration uses the unbridled tongue to illustrate the negative impact the spoken word can cause when communicating harmful, hurtful, and often private information.
38. The best word to describe this sinful act in light of the illustration is "ignite." The spoken word transfers privately held information and makes it public with the end result that others now have privy to the knowledge and some make it their privilege to pass it along to others.
39. Principle: the unbridled tongue ignites a flame that sets in motion an idea that engulfs an entire forest taking with it a person's reputation by leading many to add fuel to the fire. The best English translation is, "ignite."
40. What is said to be ignited is "the entire course of our life." The word "course" is the noun, **τροχός (trochós)**, and so translated by all major versions of the Bible.
41. **Τροχός** is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament. It originates from Classical Greek whose original translation defines it as, "a circular race, a place for running a race-course."¹
42. The word is used to describe a person's life from birth to death. Here are two examples of synonyms that depict this idea:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course [**δρόμος (drómos)**], I have kept the faith.

43. Paul defines *drómos* as, "running a race in a stadium; metaphorically meaning one's life." (See also Acts 20:24.)

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, "τροχός," in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1829.



Ephesians 2:2 ... you formerly walked according to the course [αἰών (*aiōn*)], of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

44. *Aiōn* is defined in two major ways: (1) forever or eternity and (2) sidereal time, either past, present or future. In Ephesians, Paul is referring to the lifestyle of a person's past experiences as an unbeliever.
45. These examples are efforts to precisely convey in English a metaphorical idea that is hard to nail down. Here is an excellent analysis that resolves the difficult-to-translate Greek text that reads in the NASB, "sets on fire the course of our life":

Probably no translation will convey the precise impact the phrase had on the original hearers and readers. Most commentators agree that it refers to all of human existence on the broadest scale—past, present, and future. This expression by itself is probably best understood as describing the whole circle of inner passions. The image of the wheel as a symbol for life's cyclic circumstances was widely recognized in the pagan, Jewish, and Christian world. [The Venerable] Bede took it to mean the round of human life with its temporal changes. The wheel's being set on fire means that this wrong use of the tongue engenders jealousy, and faction, and every vile deed throughout the whole of one's life.²

46. The issue remains that the tongue is the primary subject in the verse. The verse's denouement is James's use of another difficult to translate phrase, "and is set on fire by hell." Again, fire is used to illustrate the devastating impact it causes. There is an idiom from the 1800s that captures the idea:

Spread like wildfire. Disseminate or circulate very quickly, as in *The rumor about their divorce spread like wildfire*. The noun *wildfire* means "a raging, rapidly spreading conflagration."³

² William Varner, *James*, gen. ed. H. Wayne House (Bellingham, WA., 2014), 350–51.

³ Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997), 605–606.



47. James's idiom is, "set on fire by hell." The Greek word for "hell" is the noun, **Γέεννα (Géhenna)**. There is a difference between the locations to be visited by the departed.
48. There are places of residence for those who die as unbelievers: (1) prior to the destruction of the universe (2 Peter 3:10–13), all unbelievers are incarcerated in the **Τάρταρος (Tártarus)** compartment of **ᾗδης (Haídēs)** while (2) following the destruction of the universe all unbelievers are incarcerated in *Géhenna* or the Lake of Fire.
49. It is the latter term that is indicated by the word *Géhenna*. Here is a good synopsis of what James meant by his use of the word:

Not only does the tongue corrupt the whole person; it also "sets on fire," wreaks havoc, throughout one's life. But where does this enormously destructive potential come from? From hell, says James. "Hell" translates the Greek, *Géhenna*, which is a translation of two Hebrew words that mean "Valley of Hinnom." This valley, just outside Jerusalem, gained an evil reputation in the Old Testament and intertestamental period. Pagan child sacrifices were carried out there, and trash was often burned in it. Jesus used the word to refer to the place of ultimate condemnation. James again betrays his connection to Jesus, since only in the teachings of Jesus do we find this word elsewhere in the New Testament (11 times). The power of Satan himself, the chief denizen of hell, gives to the tongue its great destructive potential.

James does not elaborate the ways in which the destructive power of the tongue can make itself felt. But he undoubtedly would have thought of those sins of speech that are enumerated in Proverbs: thoughtless "chattering" (10:8 cf. 12:18; 29:20); lying (12:19); arrogant boasting (18:12); gossiping (10:18). Think what enormous, sometimes irreversible, harm can be caused to people by unsubstantiated, often false, rumors. Such a rumor can be harder to stop than any forest fire (v. 5).

