

16. We resume our study of verse 2 with its second sentence, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man.” That allowed us to then introduce the word “bridle” and its association in this context not with a horse but the human tongue. The horse’s bridle serves as a good illustration.
17. The sentence that begins the verse is an accurate statement. The truth is that “we all stumble in many ways.” The word stumble is the present active indicative of the verb, **πταίω (ptaiō)**: “to err, offend, fail in one’s duty; figuratively, to fall into sin.”
18. **Principle:** All believers fail and sin. The idea that we do not is an irrational assumption making the proponent oblivious of the truth. Uncorrected by rebound it eventually drifts into reversionism.
19. Many believers who are veterans in doctrine get comfortable when they learn to avoid sins of the flesh, but when it comes to sins of the tongue, they remain ignorant of the fires they can ignite.
20. Therefore, advancing believers can live a life free of most overt sins, but not when it comes to criticizing, judging, belittling, accusing, gossiping, or demeaning others. It makes no difference whether the claims are true or not, Matthew 7:1–2 prohibits the behavior with discipline being directed to the accuser not the accused.
21. However, the primary culprit is not the tongue. No one says anything that does not first originate in the soul. It is culprit #1. Then volition makes the decision to verbalize what is thought which is culprit #2. On some occasions, the sin of the tongue results in retaliation by the one being criticized.
22. Consequently, the tongue, which is a small member of the body, can be used to control the whole body. The tongue spreads the fire, but it is the soul that ignites the flame.
23. Therefore, the conscience plays a major role in this process. The spirit-filled believer is enabled to inculcate divine guidance through Bible study.
24. This information is acquired by positive volition to its teaching. It is retained in the *kardia* and available for consultation. But volition must make the decision to consult and then apply pertinent doctrine to the circumstance.
25. When the individual overrides his conscience, he volitionally ignores divine guidance from his doctrinal inventory. Instead, he opts for behavior patterns typically associated with sin, human good, and evil. Sins of the tongue often assimilate this entire trifecta.

26. This brings us back to our previously observed first-class condition of the conditional particle, **εἴ (eí)**: “If and it is true.” This is followed by the statement “any believer does not stumble in what he says.”
27. The word “stumble” is preceded by the negative conjunction **οὐ (ou)**: “not.” Therefore, he uses his conscience to recall the doctrine against gossiping and volitionally refrains from doing so.
28. This is followed by the phrase “in what he says,” the noun **λόγος (lógos)**. It is often translated, “word,” but is expanded in various uses. For example, here the person is “*not* forming words that are harmful when he says them.”
29. In this context, *lógos* refers to his decision *not* to utter critical words. His silence indicates restraint by his conscience to not utter things that may be harmful to others.
30. This use of *lógos* refers to verbal discourse, however, it is canceled by the negative particle *eí* meaning he did not say anything at all.
31. This believer refrained from committing a sin of the tongue. How did he accomplish this? He had doctrine in his soul which his volition consulted, resulting in him remaining silent.
32. What was the inventory he consulted? The principles and doctrines in the edification complex of his soul in concert with pertinent doctrine.
33. He was able to apply restraint because his conscience advised him to remain silent. By remaining mute, his body, specifically his tongue, was bridled, *chalinagōgéō*.
34. This leads us to the apodosis of this first-class condition. The sentence begins with the protasis, “We all commit sins. **If [protasis]** anyone does not sin in what he says with his tongue, **then [apodosis]** he is a perfect man.”
35. The word “perfect” is the adjective **τέλειος (téleios)** and it refers “to being fully developed in a moral sense.”¹ This “moral sense” defines the fictitious person of the illustration, the noun, **ἄνθρωπος (anḗr)**: an adult male.
36. Morality is involved here, but it goes further than that. In context, we have an illustration of a “mature” man. Therefore, the man, *anḗr*, is an adult, yet this noun goes beyond mere adulthood. It describes a gentleman whose doctrinal inventory characterizes him as a mature believer.
37. What the “mature believer” is enabled to do is “bridle his whole body.” Why is the soul not the thing bridled here? Because the issue being discussed is volition which is constantly under assault by the body.

¹ Walter Bauer, “τέλειος,” 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), 996 (4).

