

The Importance of the Teaching Ministry of the Church

Epistle of James

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Bible Text: James 3:1-2
Preached on: Sunday, January 7, 2018

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of James. James 3 is our text this morning. It's good to get back into the epistle of James for the first time in several months. We're going to be looking at the first two verses, actually, James 3:1 and 2. The text before us in a way it's kind of an ironic recruiting message from James. Basically you think the church needs more teachers and in a sense that's true, and yet James is going to surprise us in the way that he goes about that. So the title of the message this morning we'll see as we look at it, "The Importance of the Teaching Ministry of the Church." The importance of the teaching ministry of the church. James 3:1 and 2. We're going to go ahead and read just to get the context a little better and read all the way down through verse 8, 3:1-8. James 3:1,

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 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. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that you by your Spirit might help us as we come to your word to receive the instruction that you have for us; that our hearts would be open and receptive;

that your Spirit would do its work of illuminating this word that we might repent and believe and obey. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the importance of the teaching ministry of the church. James for a verse or two talks about the teaching ministry of the church and then he springboards into this discussion of the tongue. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren," and what we see here, we're going to see as we look at this, as we look at the implications of this, the criteria for teachers in the church of Jesus Christ. The importance of the ministry and the criteria but we're going to, first of all, look at a couple of things before we get to that and one thing I need to do right off the bat which I think is just amazingly ironic in the providence of God because basically what he's saying is be careful about being a teacher because it's really easy to mess up and God will judge you. That's essentially the theme. Don't hurry into being a teacher in the church, a pastor, an official Bible teacher in the church. Don't rush ahead into that because it's very easy to mess up because the teacher's main tool is his tongue and the tongue is the one thing that cannot be tamed so it's dangerous, James is saying, to be a teacher. I say it's ironic because two weeks ago, the last time that I preached, I made a significant error in my sermon and I need to correct that. I was reminded afterwards that I had misstated the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Some of you were here, you may have also realized this, and thank you to one of the brothers who pointed this out graciously to me, and I would always want to know when I make an error. Please let me know. Sometimes you have to pick your battles, you know. Small things but big things like this, certainly, and the Immaculate Conception, I said that it was basically the doctrine of Mary's conception and I may have misstated that the Catholic Church teaches that she was conceived of a virgin too and that's not right. The Catholic Church teaches that she was conceived in the normal way. Her father and her mother had relations but that God supernaturally kept the sin nature from transmitting from her father into Mary so that she was born sinless. So that is a heinous error but I misstated it and I want to apologize for that and ask your forgiveness for that. We want to be careful even when we are dealing with error, represent them accurately so that we will not discredit what we're saying. So anyway, I just wanted to make that clear and I do think it's interesting in God's wisdom and providence that today I get to preach on be careful about being a teacher.

What I want to do is break our time down under two main points and we're going to spend most of the time on the second. The main points, though, are the first point which we'll hit kind of quickly is the flow of the argument; and the second point is the force of the argument, and that's where we're going to look, the second part we're going to look at the criteria for teachers. That's the force of what comes through. But the flow of the argument we want to look at carefully and really see exactly what James is saying here.

So the first main point, the flow of the argument here in James 3:1 and 2. Essentially, there are three subpoints under this. The flow of the argument has three things here. There is the command. It is an imperative command, "Let not many of you become teachers." As I said, it's interesting, usually churches sometimes will have a recruitment Sunday where you recruit workers, and it's not to say that this doesn't have a place and you can't do that, it's just interesting that James says, "Let not many of you become

teachers." He is applying a filter over the teaching ministry of the church. He's not saying that those who are called to teach and who are gifted to teach should not teach, but he is apparently acknowledging that the tendency that we all have to pride and presumption; that we tend to think we know more than we know and we tend to think that we ought to be the one to be telling everybody else what to do. And all of us are that way at some level in our pride, and those of us who are disposed to teaching are apt to do that all the more.

Some of you don't have the temptation to want to teach. The last thing you would want to do is get up in front of a group and teach the Bible, and there is nothing wrong with that. In a sense, God gives the gift as he chooses and not everyone in the body is a foot or a hand or a tongue. God has given his gifts in accordance with his will and he has done it perfectly, but for those of us who would have a desire to teach, this is a caution to us and the command is, essentially, "Don't many of you become." It's interesting, he says basically the church doesn't need many teachers. That's one of the implications here, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren." Everybody doesn't need to be a teacher.

Now, it's interesting, there is a balancing truth here. Let me stop for a moment and balance this out. He's talking about the teaching offices in the church; the three offices he mentions in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and 29, that God gave apostles and prophets and teachers, and so the office of teacher, one of the gifts that God has given to the church, and speaking primarily of pastors and elders but also of other regular teachers. Ladies Bible study teachers. There are other applications of this. So he's speaking more of the formal teaching and the balance is we are all, in one sense, every Christian is called to teach because we are all called to make disciples. In Matthew 28:18-20 we are told to "go into all the world to make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." We are to be teaching one another. We see in so many different places we are to admonish one another; to teach one another; to encourage one another; to build one another up through the word of God; to speak the word of God to one another. So we are all called to teach, in that sense, so this is a balance James is bringing here. He realizes this is something, though, that can be a temptation to some of us to be presumptuous and prideful in the way that we assume the office.

So the command is, "Let not many of you become teachers." That's the first subpoint. We are talking about the flow of the argument. There is one command. Now, the second thing we see in the passage is a reason. The next two things, the second and third point are two reasons. He says, "Let not many of you become teachers, and I'll tell you why." And the first thing he says, "knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." The reason you don't want to become a teacher too quickly is if you become a teacher, you can know you are going to have a stricter judgment from God. That's a sobering word, isn't it? And James, I think it's probably in the book of James because he is writing primarily to Jewish believers, those who were Jews who came to Christ. Remember James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus is the one who led the church in Jerusalem and taught there and was the main preacher/teacher there in Jerusalem, from what we can tell, as the apostles began to disperse throughout the Mediterranean world. He was the one leading the church in

Jerusalem. Then when the dispersion happened with persecution, he writes this letter, as he said in James 1:1, "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad." He's writing to Jewish believers and he knows that Jewish believers, especially Jews, grow up admiring the teaching office, the rabbi. Many Jewish parents want their sons to grow up and be rabbis. "Oh, that's what I want for my son and my son is really smart," and they want him to study under the rabbi and become a rabbi. So we can aspire to these things and James is saying, "Listen, you need to be careful about wanting to be up in front of people ministering the word of God. There doesn't need to be a whole lot of the people doing that. God will call who he calls and he will equip who he equips, but be careful, and the first reason is because if you are that person, you will experience a stricter judgment."

A stricter judgment. This is something that the New Testament makes clear in a number of places. If you just turn your Bible over a page or two back to the beginning, you come to Hebrews 13:17, this idea of judgment. Responsibility means accountability. Hebrews 13:17. Some of the teachers in the church that are called by God are the elders. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." The exhortation is obey your leaders in the Lord because they are going to give an account for you before God. That's a sobering word. I remember reading, I can't remember which Puritan said this but some years back I read a Puritan who was talking about the sizes of churches, a Puritan pastor. It was written several hundred years ago. And he said so many young pastors aspire to greater positions and more people under their ministry. He says, "When you stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep to give an account for the church that you shepherded, however small your church was, you will find that it was large enough."

This is what we see here. Romans 14:12, every believer is going to have to give an account, "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body." Christians will have to be judged by Jesus Christ. In fact, turn to that passage that Jess read earlier, 1 Corinthians 3. I want to read verses 12 to 15. He read 1 to 15 of 1 Corinthians 3. Paul and Apollos in the building upon the foundation, now, the judgment that if you believe in Jesus Christ, you will not be judged for your sins. If you have placed your faith in Christ, your sins have been taken away. They have been nailed to the cross and as we sang about earlier, his wounds plead for you over your sins. His blood has washed them away. But we shall still give an account before our Master for the way that we conduct ourselves and it's an issue of rewards but it's a solemn business to stand before the King of kings and the Lord of lords and to give an account, and it will determine, the judgment that we experience will determine rewards. That's what we see in 1 Corinthians 3 when he says in verse 12, he's talking about Paul and himself and Apollos, they were both building the church but as God is doing all the work, he says in verse 12, "Now if any man," this is the works that we do before the Lord, "if any man builds on the foundation," of Jesus Christ, "with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day," that is the day of judgment when they stand before Christ, "the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any

man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." You see, that's a judgment, just the believers of their works, and James is now saying that the judgment in that day will be stricter for those who teach.

So he says you enter into that not lightly but soberly. Another thing that we could infer from this, the rest of the New Testament is, that if the judgment that we are under when we teach is greater at the judgment seat of Christ, we can also properly infer that his fatherly discipline will be greater for those who teach in this life. Hebrews 12, he talks about that he disciplines every son of his, his fatherly discipline. That's his spanking of us, as it were, in this life. If you're in teaching, if you're a leader, that discipline will come with greater force because the Lord is going to take care of his church, his sheep. It's the church of the living God which he purchased with his own blood. Now, it doesn't mean he stops loving the believer, the true believer who is a teacher who errs. He doesn't stop loving him. Christ's blood still pleads for him. He's still going to be saved but he will be disciplined, according to James, in a more severe way, a more strict way, a greater way. Actually, the word says, "greater judgment," back to James 3:1, "we will incur a stricter judgment." We will receive, literally in the Greek, we will receive a greater judgment, and the word for "judgment" is that the result of the judging process. It's really more of the condemnation or the punishment or the effect than the process itself. We will receive the recompense that we deserve. It will be stricter, greater.

So that's a reason, he says, to not rush into the teaching ministry of the church. Then he gives a second reason which is found there at the beginning of verse 2, "For we all stumble in many ways." He says the judgment is going to be stricter and just remember, one thing about all of us is we sure mess up easy. We all stumble in many ways. The word "stumble" here is a word which really sometimes different words are used in the New Testament, some mean more, imply more sin and spiritual malice, disobedience. This is more of a word that implies just a stumbling, a tripping up, a mistake. We all easily make mistakes and we're going to be accountable for those mistakes.

So do you want to have the ministry where you are responsible to use your tongue which is the thing that stumbles the easiest, which is the whole point of what he says after that. I mean, it is so easy to mess up with your tongue and look at the damage that it can do. That's what we're going to see as we begin to look at the rest of this passage. I mean, the tongue is hard to control so he says in verses 7 to 8, he says, "Think about it. Every beast has been tamed." You think about that. Guys stick their heads in lion's mouths. Now I think that's a pretty stupid thing to do even if the lion is tame, but they teach the lion and I've never heard of anybody actually dying doing that. Maybe it has happened but it doesn't happen that often. They hit an elephant with a little stick and he does exactly what they want him to do. Even more impressive to me is like Sea World, a killer whale does exactly what this little guy in this wetsuit is telling the killer whale. This little gal in a wetsuit is telling the killer whale what to do and the killer whale does it. How is that? James says that's nothing compared to taming your tongue. To tame the tongue of a sinner, it is a frightful ordeal.

He says it can't be done. Now, of course, it can by grace because he has basically said in verse 2, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." And we ought to be seeking that and he said in chapter 1, verse 26 when he was talking about true religion, he said, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." The implication is Christians, true Christians are going to labor at bridling their tongue and this is going to be one of the great fruits of true faith, genuine faith. As Jesus said, "Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks." He says that in Luke 6 in the context of testing the fruit of false teachers and true teachers. It is out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.

So the tongue is a great indicator of where someone's sanctification is but James is saying on the front end, "Listen, you want to be working on your sanctification for a long time before you become a teacher." This is a general rule, he's saying. Now, God can do things differently and he does things differently with every one of us; there are no rules that we can say, you know, you've got to be a believer so long, you've got to study all these things. No. No, we don't know. The Lord is going to do it his own way but he's saying, "Just be careful. Be cautious. Slow down. Be cautious and careful because failing is so easy. It is so easy to trip up in what you say." It gets easier as you get older, too, it seems like, doesn't it? The wrong word just comes out of your mouth. It's not even the word you're thinking. I mean, we say a lot of things wrong because we just think wrong and what we are thinking in our brain comes out of our mouth and it's wrong, but sometimes it seems like what's in the brain and what comes out of the mouth, there is something that happens between.

So he's just saying be careful. That's the basic flow of the argument. The command, "Let not many of you become teachers," two reasons, because we will be judged by Christ in a stricter way and because failure is so easy. Judgment is imminent, failure is easy. So that's the flow of the argument.

Now, what's the force of the argument? How do we apply this? It doesn't mean that nobody should teach. Everybody just stop teaching. We'll just all sit around. I'm going to stop talking because I'm messing up too and so no teaching. No, that's not what he wants us to do and some of you are called to be teachers and you need to teach because there are balancing truths of Scripture. If he gives you a talent, you don't bury it. You use that for his glory, but the idea is you use it in the right way, and he is just saying he knows our propensity to run on ahead, and so James is really putting the brakes on and he's saying watch out. He's not saying don't teach, he's saying watch out and be careful.

Now with that, the force of the argument, the second main point. The church needs teachers. Teaching is essential to the life breath of the church, the life blood of the church. I mean, our life is the word of God. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." He exhorts in the New Testament, Paul telling Timothy, "Speak the words which are fitting for sound doctrine. Preach the word. Teach the word." This is what the church is about, it's about teaching because we need the word of God. We don't need just to read the word of God, we need

to be taught the word of God and we need to teach one another, as we said earlier, admonish one another, encourage one another. There is something, God has wired us so that we need to hear the word of God from other people.

So the church needs teaching, not too many teachers, but the church needs teaching. It needs the right teachers, those that God is setting apart to that work. There are four criteria I want us to consider that begin to flow from this passage as we look at it and think it through. Four criteria for godly teaching that we should aspire to in our own lives so that God can use us. I think it was John Wesley that said, "Deepen your message and God will widen your ministry." You work on deepening your message, God will widen your ministry. So these four things are ways that we can deepen our own message; that the ministry that God is doing in us so that we are ready to be used by him and he will take care of that.

The first thing is four criteria. The application, the force of the argument. The second main point, the force of the argument. Four criteria for godly teaching. The first criteria, the first thing to examine is motive. Motive. What is my motive for teaching the word of God? What is my heart aimed at? This is what James is dealing with in a very direct way when he says, he brings to mind judgment. He's saying that the motive needs to be not pride, not position, not the approval of men, the motive needs to be the fear of the Lord. Is our motive in teaching to honor him and out of reverence for him? Isaiah 66:1, Isaiah says, the Lord says through Isaiah talking about the temple, you know, "Do I dwell in a building? In a small place like this? No, I dwell with he who is humble and contrite and who trembles at my word. This is the one I will dwell with."

So James is saying our motive needs to be the fear of God, not pride or presumption, but the sense that the Lord is calling you to teach. In fact, I would say, you know, we need teachers, we are always going to need teachers in the church who are really two things, who are gifted. Well, I would say three things: gifted, called and equipped. But this motive speaks to those first two: gifted and called. If the Lord gives you a gift, you are to use your gift. You have received the gift and if your motive is to use your gift for the glory of God, you see, that's the right motive. God has given me this gift. He has given me this talent. The talents, remember, the word means "a large amount of money; a large amount of gold," and the servants were to use that gold for their master's benefit to make more money for him. Well, the gifts that we have we are to use to give more glory to God. We are not to hold them back. In fact, the idea of burying your talent, that's a terrible thing. The master is incredibly angry at the person who buries his talent and takes it away from him and casts him into outer darkness. That's not the spirit of the true believer. The true believer wants to spend himself and use whatever talent he has and so it's good if you have the gift of teaching, you want to teach. It's good that you want to. That's the balance. He's just saying approach it the right way.

So gifted and called. If you are gifted, then he is going to call you, and what does that calling look like? Well, let's think about it. Like I said, it applies to every ministry. It applies to teaching the word of God in a small group Bible study, it applies to teaching the word of God in a Sunday morning Bible study, preaching, evangelizing, all of these

things. But the idea of being called, we need gifted teachers but also those who are called to teach. That is, those whom the Lord is calling directly to use their gifts in a particular way. When we talk about, sometimes it's easier to talk about the calling to ministry, Gospel ministry, which is a unique form of this calling. When someone is called to preach and teach the word, they go off to seminary or to study and get equipped and ready to lead the church. We speak of theologians and pastors have spoken of two aspects of this calling of God upon someone's life: the internal call and the external call. The internal call is that sense, the burden of the heart which aspires to the office, like 1 Timothy 3:1 says, if any man aspires to the office of overseer, if he aspires to the office of overseer, it is a good work he desires to do. So that's part of the calling. Is there a desire in the heart, a burden in the heart to serve the church and is that burden pure? There can be a desire in the heart to be in a prominent position. There could be the desire in the heart to be in front of people, to enjoy entertaining people, or whatever. That's not the calling of the Shepherd.

If there is the desire in the heart to shepherd the people of God, to feed the people the word of God, that's the first part of the calling. But the internal call will be matched by an external call, and that is that the church, itself, will affirm that. Other believers will recognize, "Yes, this person is gifted and we believe as we pray about it, they are called to minister in this way." That's essentially what happens when we ordain an elder. That's what's happening. The church is affirming it in a big way, in that sense, and we should do that with any minister that we have grow up out of our church, called to the Gospel ministry. We should affirm those gifts and if you are aspiring to that teaching office, in some way you would want that confirmation.

So the motive, the first criteria of godly teaching, is a right motive. Not pride. Not presumption. It's not the aspiring to the office and, "I don't care that nobody else recognizes how gifted I am." Aspire to the office and see what God does through his people and take seriously what he does through his people. And realize that when his people tell me to slow down or to stop or maybe to redirect and go in a different direction, that's not them resisting, that's God working in my life to show me where he wants me to go.

So the motive, fear of the Lord rather than pride and presumption. That's the first thing, the first criteria of godly teaching. Motive. The second criteria is the message. The message. It's the word. The person who is called to teach, what is he called to teach? He is called to teach the word. He is not called to share his own ideas and insights, his experiences. Those things can sometimes help frame but the content of what is delivered must be the word, and if it's not, that's not biblical godly teaching at all. James, in fact his whole book is about, he wants the people he's writing to to be doers, not hearers only. They are to be hearers but not merely hearers, not hearers only. They are to be hearers and doers of what? The word. Paul said, "Preach the word." Jesus said, "Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you, all that I have given you in the word." Jude says, "The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. This is the content that you are to communicate." You're not looking for something new, something novel, something hip and cool. No, it's the word of the living God.

That's the message. In a sense, it's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It's the word of God, the 66 books of the Bible, but it's the whole truth. Acts 20, Paul in speaking to the Ephesian elders and sharing his own example with them and calling them to this kind of ministry, he says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." In verse 20, actually in verse 27, in verse 20 he actually says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable." What he's saying is, "Everything that you needed to hear from God's word, I gave you. I didn't hold back. I didn't hold back because I wanted to please you or to be liked by you, I gave you the whole message."

So it's the truth and the whole truth and that gets back to motive, doesn't it? How can you give the whole truth if your motive is not the fear of the Lord? If your motive is the fear of man, you will not give the whole truth. You will shrink from declaring. But if your motive is the fear of God, then the message, it's clear it must be the truth and the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We don't add to the word of God and we don't take away from the word of God. Revelation 22, that's something that is made clear at the very end of the Bible, that if you add to the books of this prophecy, and I think God puts that at the capstone at the end of the Bible basically to say it's true of the whole Scripture. "If you add anything to what is given in this canon, may God add to you the plagues that are written in the book of Revelation. If you take away from anything that is written in this book, may God take away your name from the Book of Life." It is serious business. This is why it is so destructive to have teachings like what I mentioned earlier about extra stuff about Mary; the idea of the Immaculate Conception, the sinlessness of Mary. It is taught nowhere in the Bible. It's added and that's the problem with it, and the Roman Catholic Church needs to heed the words of Jesus when he spoke to the Pharisees and he said to them, "You have made the word of God of none effect through your traditions. Your traditions that you have added to the word have rendered the word of God of no effect." God hates that because his word is everything.

So the message is the second criteria, the truth and the whole truth. The motive, the fear of the Lord. The message, the truth, the whole truth. Thirdly, the third criteria of godly teaching is method. The method must be pleasing to the Lord and this flows out right out of James 3, in the sense that his admonition or his reminder that we all stumble in many ways. It's very easy to make a mistake. He's like saying, "Be careful. It's very easy to really mess this up so watch your step." You know, if you're walking along and you're taking a hike through the woods and you're just in a nice area where there are no problems, you know, as you hike, you have different terrain you encounter. Some is more pleasant. Downhill is always good, right? Uphill is a little harder, right? But sometimes you'll find yourself when you are hiking, you go from in a pleasant terrain, everything is fun, you're just kind of looking around and enjoying the sights, to now you are walking along a ledge and the drop-off is severe. You have a different mindset, and if you have little ones with you, you really have a different mindset and usually you've got somebody's hand because it's not worth, you cannot take the risk until they are older and able to assume that responsibility. "Now, son, be careful." But even that reminder has to be there.

This is essentially what James is saying. The method, be careful is what he's essentially saying. If you're going to be a teacher and you're going to experience stricter judgment and it's so easy to make mistakes, it is absolutely imperative that you give great care to the work. It's interesting in the context. You think about the flow of the book of James and I think it ties together a lot more than sometimes at first appearances it seems. It seems like at times he's talking about something and you're almost tempted to think he's ADD. He's talking about this and then, boom, he's over here. I don't think that's the case at all. Of course, we know the Holy Spirit is working in writing his book the way he wants it, but he's using human authors and you do see the personality and you really see James's personality for the dramatic impactful illustration. I mean, he just layers them on top of each other: the fire, the untamed beast that is full of deadly poison. The picture is you're taming a snake and the snake doesn't listen to you and he bites you and you die. That's not good.

Anyway, so James's personality comes through but one of the things but I think there is a logical, clearly a logical flow as you go through the book as well, and as I thought about this, why does he talk about teachers in chapter 3, verse 1? I think it's because he's just dealt with 2:14 through 26, the complexity of faith and works in the Gospel of grace. He has dealt with a complex subject that is often misunderstood. We believe that salvation is by grace alone and not because we are saved, we are justified by faith alone apart from works. This is the teaching of the New Testament. James, we saw at first, appears to be contradicting that but he is not at all contradicting that when you look at it carefully. But even as he works through it, you can see how important it is to handle the word with great care.

So he finishes his discussion of that important subject and he says, "That reminds me. If you're going to be teaching the word, you need to be careful because there are doctrines that need to be handled with great care. You need to be willing to dig hard and do the effort, the work, and you need to be willing to pray and have a listening, teachable heart so that you can learn from others." The method is diligence, great care; the awareness that we can trip up and the tripping up can be of great impact. That's what those images were. I mean, if you trip up and you are, I can't imagine those guys that do that, you know, the snake, the cobras, snake charmer. You know, you get a coughing fit in the middle of a snake charming thing, it's over. Or you let a fire get out of control. A little fire, a little small fire. Well, we've seen that haven't we, in California? Incredible power of fire. He's saying, "Listen, teaching the word of God is of eternal significance and consequence and it can have dramatic impact on the souls of men so it requires great care."

2 Timothy 2:15, this is why Paul says study, he's speaking to the young pastor Timothy, "study to show yourself approved, a workman who need not be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." You are a workman. Study hard so that you will be approved, you won't be ashamed. Colossians 1:28 and 29, the Apostle Paul in speaking of his own teaching ministry, look at the labor involved in teaching the word of God. He says, "We proclaim Him," speaking of Jesus, "we proclaim Christ, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man

complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." It is hard work, Paul says. It must be approached that way.

So the motive must be right. The message must be right. The method must be right. And fourthly, the fourth criteria of the godly teaching ministry is the manner must be biblical and right, how we go about it. Again, this flows right out of the idea of James reminding us. He says, "my brethren," and it's interesting, I love how he puts himself in with us. The humility of James. He says, "my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." I know that as I'm teaching you right now, James is saying, I am with you. We are going to incur stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. It's so easy to stumble.

Alexander White was a great Scottish preacher and I was reading a quote by him the other day and he basically was saying, he was a wonderful minister, respected, revered, written wonderful, well, his sermons were of great impact and, you know, for many other men, and he basically says in this quote, "When I look back at the way that the carelessness with which I have spoken, the damage that I have done to those that I love and that have loved me, I feel such the weight of guilt and discouragement overwhelming me." It's serious business. There should be a sobriety and a soberness. Paul says in Acts 20, which I mentioned earlier, his message to the Ephesian elders, he says, "Night and day I solemnly testified to you of the Gospel." Solemnly testifying. The seriousness. It doesn't mean that there can't be moments of more or less lite, but it shouldn't be the overall tenor and tone of a ministry. The overall tenor and tone is these are serious things. As Richard Baxter who also I remember reading him and he would in one of his books, he says, he was a Reformed pastor, "When I got through preaching, I kept asking myself how could I have said the things I said without tears?" He said, "O, that I may preach as a dying man to dying men as if never to preach again."

So those that God has called and that God has gifted and that God has equipped to minister the word, there will be a seriousness about them. This is why when you look at the qualifications for deacon and elder, that's one of the words you see come up that we don't in American culture aspire to. Sort of gravity. Seriousness. The word "grave," it used to be a good word, part of it. Obviously, it wasn't always a good word, that part about being a grave. That's not good, necessary, but serious. Solemn. A person who is serious where he needs to be serious because it's just natural to him because he really believes the things that he's saying or she believes the things that she's saying.

When you have the right motive, the fear of the Lord, and you bring the right message because you use the right methods, you work hard, and then the manner is there as well, the seriousness, the solemnity, preaching as a dying man to dying men, then God is glorified. His work is done. His kingdom is built. Unbelievers will be converted. Believers will be built up. But most importantly, he will be exalted and glorified. As he said in Isaiah 66, "To this one I will look. This is the one I am going to dwell with," he is basically saying. "I don't dwell in a temple, I dwell with the man who is humble and contrite and who trembles at my word." May God help us all be more like that and may God grant that his church will have leaders like that until he returns.

Let's pray.

Our Father, how grateful we are for your precious word which is light and life, how much we need it, how unworthy we are, Lord, to handle it. We thank you for the blood of Jesus which washes us, cleanses us. Father, we pray that you would help us to be a people who do tremble at your word and who are able, then, to hold forth the word of life to other believers and to the lost around us with greater force and compassion and effectiveness. We pray that you would be glorified in your church. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.