

## A Warning to Teachers (James 3:1, 2)

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### Introduction

1. We are entering the third of four tests of faith: (1) trial-tested faith, (2) truth-tested faith, (3) tongue-tested faith, and (4) thirst-tested faith.
2. James launches the discussion of the tongue by warning his readers against pursuing teaching careers because words will be brought into judgment, especially words that demand attention and require not only hearing but *heeding*.
3. There was clearly a problem that James was seeking to quell in the opening verse of chapter three.
  - a. We have a prohibition (*mē*) with a present middle imperative of “to teach” (*ginomai*) that should read, “*Stop becoming many teachers.*”
  - b. Apparently, too many Jewish Christians were trying to teach what they really did not understand.
3. Remember that James wrote before there were any New Testament writings—no gospels, no epistles, and no Apostle Paul.
4. James had in mind the Jewish culture with its teaching priests, the rabbis.
  - a. Rabbis, necessary because less than 5% of the people could read or write, were highly respected and revered teachers of the Law.
  - b. Since hearers could not check on the validity of the teacher’s material, teachers were held to very strict standards to insure accuracy in the teaching.
5. It is this understanding that we must carry into our examination of this text.
  - a. There is a very great need for people to teach the Word of God to others—whether one-on-one to friend or neighbor, a parent to his children, Bible teachers to saint and sinner, or the pastor/teacher to the church.
  - b. Teaching is necessary to convey the truth of Scripture to human hearts for growth in grace and obedience to truth.

### I. Background of the Warning

1. Jesus was the greatest teacher ever.
  - a. “*He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes*” (Matt. 7:29).
  - b. “*When the crowd heard it [His authority], they were astonished at his teaching*” (Matt. 22:33).
  - c. His teaching, however, upset the religious authorities because He did not seek approval from them: “*The chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?’*” (Matt. 21:23).
  - d. At the same time, however, these authorities could not dispute the soundness of His teaching. “*Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances*” (Matt. 22:16).
2. On the other hand, Jesus often rebuked Israel’s teachers for their wrong motives and actions.
  - a. “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice*” (Matt. 23:1, 2).

- b. Prestige seekers: “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts (Mark 12:38, 39). “But you are not to be called rabbi [for the sake of mere prestige], for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers” (Matt. 23:8).
- c. Hypocrisy: “For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:27, 28). “[They] devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation” (Mark 12:40).

## II. The Problem of Teaching

1. In the passages just considered, note the following issues raised, which are James’s concern also:
  - a. The rabbis *presumed* upon their position for the *prestige* that it afforded but without regard for the *responsibility* the position required. “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not” (Jer. 45:5).
  - b. The rabbis used their position for personal advantage often at the expense of the helpless; thus, James warns that teachers are judged with greater scrutiny.
2. Teaching is often tilted more to personal *opinion* than to explaining and applying the *text*.
  - a. Paul warned of those who pursued trivial and carnal arguments (2 Tim. 2:23-26).
  - b. As James taught, it is only the implanted Word that is able to save our souls (James 1:21).
3. We must all beware of the fact that even our casual words will be judged (Matt. 12:36).
4. Jesus also taught that each of us is accountable for what we *know* (Luke 12:47, 48).
  - a. Some that think they know more than others set themselves in the church to teach (2 Peter 3:16).
  - b. The New Testament, therefore, argues that teachers are to be examples of the faith by living truth out before others (1 Tim. 4:12, 16; 1 Pet. 5:3).
5. James notes that we all stumble in many ways, but the one who does not stumble in what he says is a perfect man (v. 2).
  - a. Because of their position, teachers must be doubly careful of what they say and how they say it because they have great influence on people and can cause many problems.
  - b. Since the tongue is the last member of the body to be controlled, teachers must be very careful not to use them wrongly!

## III. The Need for Teachers

1. God has gifted His church with teachers because of the importance of the Word of God in the lives of the saints (Eph. 4:11).
  - a. Discipleship requires teaching (Matt. 28:19, 20; 2 Tim. 2:1, 2).
  - b. The health and spiritual prosperity of the church requires good teaching (2 Tim. 4:1-5).
2. Paul argued that teaching elders were so vital that the church was required give them double honor (1 Tim. 5:17).

If God has called you to teach, why aren’t you teaching?

Do you not understand that you teach best more often by what you do than what you say?