



CAPITOL COMMISSION

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COLORADO

James 3:1 Teaching and the Tongue

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James insists that a living faith must be revealed by a demonstration of good works. There is no place where we can see the relationship between faith and works demonstrated more clearly than in a person's speech. Our speech, our words reflect what's in our heart and controlling the tongue is a matter of the heart. Christianity is a doctrine that must be lived out. The genuineness of one's faith will eventually be evidenced by one's speech. A faith that is real and genuine is able to bridle and control the tongue. A faith that is real will be seen by what the tongue talks about. We will all give account for every word we say.

I. THE TONGUE REVEALS THE HEART - JAMES 3

The Word of God says much about the tongue and there is no other place in Scripture that deals with it so thoroughly than in the book of James, in particular chapter three. James shows what it means to have a faith that "works" in every aspect of our life. And he will speak to the issue of the tongue more strongly than any N.T. writer. In James, God has established that hearing the Word of God means obeying it. A real faith will be an active faith. In chapter 3, James begins a complete sermon on the significance and importance of a controlled tongue, man's inability to control the tongue, the power and vicious nature of the tongue, the inconsistency and dangers of our speech and the need for true wisdom in speech and life. True saving faith will be demonstrated, and it will be evident by what we say. The third chapter of James will challenge us to examine our hearts by examining our words. The control of our tongue is a matter of great importance to God and controlling our speech is a chief mark of a believer! James begins his discourse on the tongue by addressing those who are teachers first in James 3:1.

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." James 3:1

II. TEACHING AND THE TONGUE- JAMES 3:1

There is no doubt this will be a challenging and convicting chapter for true faith will be demonstrated by the tongue under control. James initiates his discussion on the tongue by issuing a sobering warning. Let's see what he has to say.

A. "LET NOT MANY BECOME TEACHERS"- JAMES 3:1A

James places the negative first at the beginning of his sentence and in doing so, emphasizes the profound responsibility of those who teach in the church. "Let not many become" is a serious imperative, a command issued as a

warning to any who teach in the church. Of course, James is clearly not trying to discourage believers from becoming teachers. He understands the critical need for qualified teachers, but it won't be the "many", for some should and others should not. When James says "many", he makes the point that **some** should teach, **not the many!** James emphasizes restraint regarding those who teach, especially for those who may not be qualified.

Implied by what James writes is that there were many who sought the opportunity to teach. After all, it is a prominent position in the church. Teachers have incredible influence and power. We must be clear on what it means to teach and why James is emphasizing this.

B. "TEACHERS"- JAMES 3:1A

The word teacher (*didaskaloi* in the Greek) simply means an instructor, a master, a teacher. This term is used 58 times in the New Testament and 48 times in the Gospels alone. Forty-one of those times refer to Jesus Christ and in Matthew 26:18 our Lord assumes the absolute title of "*Ho Didaskalos*" which is "*The Teacher*". Teachers were highly honored and respected in the church. Many Jewish teachers were known as rabbis and that term itself meant "*My great one*" clearly demonstrating how those who held that office were held in high regard.

From Acts 13:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Ephesians 4:11, it is clear that the position of teachers in the early Christian church were called to give progressive instruction of Scriptures and explain God's redeeming plan found in the gospel. The apostle Paul called himself a teacher in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11. Teachers then and now give believers instruction in the practical faith, life and duties of the Christian, seeking to ground them in the knowledge and understanding of Scripture and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Obviously a prominent place was given to those who teach because through it, God's Word is faithfully passed on.

Essential to being a teacher would be the requirement that you are adequately qualified and take the responsibility seriously. Speaking of the responsibility of teachers, Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:5-7, "*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*" These men wanted the honor this position afforded without taking the responsibility seriously. While desiring to teach, they did not understand what they taught and yet they

spoke confidently of what they did not even know. Their goal by teaching was not *“love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”* Their goal was position and pride. But a true teacher requires the mastering of Scripture and sincere application of God’s Word which zeros in on their life first. Through the continual study, meditation and immersion in Scripture, the transforming work of God’s Word begins in the heart of teachers first as they submit their lives to all God says.

James wants all believers to understand what comes as a result of this responsibility of teaching. One must not rush hastily into this work of teaching. Motives must be scrutinized and qualifications examined. Remember the exhortation to Timothy from Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”* To be *“diligent”* means to have a zealous persistence, intently studying and searching out Scripture in order to handle, effectively teach, and accurately use God’s Word. It means that if you teach, you give your absolute maximum effort to pass on God’s Word accurately and clearly, not misrepresenting His Word in any way. There are no short cuts to being grounded in Scripture. It is essential that every teacher be willing to take the time needed to have an accurate understanding of Scripture before teaching it. Inaccurately teaching God’s Word and confusing our Lord’s clear instruction was a problem in the church and remains so today. To teach God’s Word doesn’t mean we explain what it *“means to me.”* It means we accept the responsibility to clearly communicate what God Himself is saying regardless of what we think or feel. That is a weighty role not to be taken lightly and requires a serious commitment of time and effort.

James doesn’t intend to keep any from teaching who are qualified. The question is, are you qualified to teach and are you willing to accept the responsibility that comes with it.

James warns that one should not rush hastily into the work of teaching and he makes it clear that those who assume the role will be strictly held accountable for what they say, how they live and how they use their position. Remember, Jesus reserved some of His sternest words for religious teachers who *“said, but did not”*. (Matthew 23:2-3, 24, Luke 11:52) Few are fitted for this work and James reminds us that few are called to it.

C. “MY BROTHERS”- JAMES 3:1B

Before continuing, James makes it clear who he is writing to. He is not talking about false teachers here, those who are not of the faith. Rather, James addresses the danger of not *“handling accurately the word of truth”* with reckless statements and personal opinions, half truths with half hearted preparation on the part of those who assume the role of a teacher. James clearly writes to believers who were posing as teachers or who wanted to teach. James wants all believers to make sure their desire to teach was

according to God’s calling and not their own selfish desires. Again, James understood the need for teachers, but it’s not the *“many”* who should teach. Some should, others should not!

D. “KNOWING THAT AS SUCH WE”- JAMES 3:1C

By saying *“knowing that as such”*, or *“because you know”*, James makes it clear that those being warned here knew that if they taught, they placed themselves under stricter accountability. This was not a new revelation.

And then James makes a change from second person imperative *“you”* earlier in the verse to the first person plural of *“we”*. By doing so, he includes himself as a teacher revealing his warning not just to others, but to himself as well. That’s humility.

E. “WILL INCUR A STRICTER JUDGMENT”- JAMES 3:1D

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” James 3:1

James has no desire to restrain those whose gift and call upon their life by God is to teach. Rather, he wants to make sure that teachers understand what comes as a result of this responsibility. Since a teacher’s work is accomplished primarily with the tongue, it is fundamental that teachers demonstrate consistent maturity with their tongue for teachers will be held to a higher standard and judgment.

The phrase, *“will incur”* is a future tense verb that looks forward. What is it looking forward to? James makes that clear with these words, *“a stricter judgment”*. James reminds all teachers that we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day and give an account for all we’ve said and done. As teachers, we will look forward to a *“stricter”* or greater, more severe judgment of our words and lives. God takes the role of teaching incredibly seriously and so, James warns, must we. There will be a time in the future when all teachers (and believers as well) will stand before the judgment seat of Christ as Romans 14:10-12, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10 reveals and be judged according to the deeds of their lives. This judgment will be based on God’s opinion **not** man’s or the world’s! Romans 14:12 tells us that *“each one of us will give an account of himself to God”*. Author Curtis Vaughan says this, *“A ready tongue without an informed mind, a devout character and a holy life will hinder rather than advance the cause of Christ. It is extremely easy for vanity, self-conceit and spiritual pride to creep in.”*¹ Increased influence will mean increased responsibility and greater accountability before God for those who assume the role of teaching. Thus James begins his discourse on the tongue.

¹ Vaughan, Curtis, James, Founders Study Guide Commentary. Founders Press: Cape Coral, Florida, 2003. Pg. 67.