

Studies in James

Lesson 10

A Warning to Teachers

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the third chapter of his letter, James attacks one of the biggest problems in the life of the Christian – THE TONGUE!
 - A. This is a problem that's faced by everyone living on the face of the earth – rich or poor, educated or uneducated, faithful to the Lord or unfaithful to the Lord.
 1. Everyone talks about curbing this wild beast, but so far, no one has come up with an easy solution.
 - B. But when we turn to James chapter 3, we find there is NO OTHER section of the Bible that speaks with GREATER AUTHORITY OR IMPACT on this subject of THE TONGUE.
- II. By way of introduction, James addresses those who use their tongues more than anyone else – TEACHERS!
 - A. **James 3:1-2** – *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in*

many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

1. It might appear, on the surface, that James is attacking teachers and preachers.

a. It appears as though he is warning people AGAINST becoming involved in teaching and preaching.

b. So, how do we rationalize THIS against other passages that COMMAND and EXHORT us to be teachers – passages such as:

(1). **Matthew 28:19-20** – *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

(2). **2 Timothy 2:1-2** – *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

(3). **Hebrews 5:12-14** – *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who*

partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

2. Let's take a closer look at what James is REALLY saying in James chapter 3.
 - a. And when we DO, we'll discover James is giving a SPECIFIC COMMAND, followed by an EXPLANATION of that command, then he'll give a further CLARIFICATION of that command.
3. So let's begin.

BODY:

- I. First, let's examine THE COMMAND: James begins with a DIRECT IMPERATIVE.
 - A. **James 3:1a** – *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers..."*

The idea being expressed by James is, "Stop being so eager to become a teacher."

 1. On the SURFACE, this seems to contradict everything we've just read about teaching.

- a. From what Jesus taught in the Great Commission, it's clear that He expects US to carry the message of the gospel into the world just as much as the APOSTLES.
 - b. Paul exhorted Timothy to ENTRUST the word to faithful men who will be able to TEACH others.
 - c. Paul also rebuked the Hebrews for not being spiritually mature enough TO teach.
2. So, why does James say, "Don't rush into teaching," when OTHERS seem to be saying just the OPPOSITE?
- II. That brings us to THE EXPLANATION: James introduces his readers to a very SOBERING REALITY.
- A. **James 3:1** – *"...let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. "*
1. James warns that teachers will incur (receive) a STRICTER JUDGMENT than those who HEAR them. **(James 3:1b)**
 2. In other words, God will judge us more CRITICALLY, scrutinize us more CLOSELY, examine our hearts more INTENTLY.
 3. But why? Why should TEACHERS be judged any more harshly or critically than any OTHER Christian?

III. That brings us to THE CLARIFICATION: James concludes the matter by further explaining WHY teachers will incur a stricter judgment.

A. **James 3:2-5** – *For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!*

1. Teachers will incur a stricter judgment because they are NOT ONLY going to be judged on the basis of WHAT they teach, but also by HOW they teach it.
2. Right or wrong – preachers and teachers have a tremendous amount of power and influence.
 - a. People place a great amount of trust and confidence in those who teach and preach the Word of God.
3. James adds, *"See how great a forest a little fire kindles!" (v. 5b)*
One small flame can destroy an ENTIRE FOREST – JUST AS EASILY AS one boastful, arrogant preacher can devastate an entire congregation.

B. No one was MORE aware of this than the apostle Paul.

1. **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12** – *For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one*

of you, as a father does his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

2. Paul says his coming to Thessalonica was not "*in vain*" (useless, unprofitable) for several reasons – SIX, of which, are mentioned here.
- C. Let's take a closer look at the SIX REASONS why Paul's preaching was not "vain."
1. First, Paul said he came preaching the TRUTH, not error. **(v. 3)**
 - a. Teachers are responsible for teaching the TRUTH and not their OPINIONS.
 - b. This is not to say we CAN'T express our opinions – we all have them.
 - c. But the teacher cannot SUBSTITUTE his opinions FOR the truth, nor DISGUISE his opinions AS the truth.
 - (1). If it is an opinion, SAY SO! Say, "This is how I understand this passage... this is where I'm at right now in my study."
 - (2). This leaves the door open for change.
 - d. Beside, what teacher can truthfully claim that they have absolute, complete doctrinal truth on EVERY subject?
 - (1). The more we study, the closer we come to an understanding of the truth.

- (2). This means, the more we study, the more we are apt to change our view about certain teachings.
 - (3). That is normal, spiritual growth and development: The more we study, the more we learn. The more we learn, the more we're apt to change.
 - e. Therefore, every teacher and preacher needs to be very careful about what we call the truth.
 - (1). If we're going to label something we teach as TRUTH, then we better be ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN that we can support that claim with Scriptural evidence.
 - f. If we can't tell the difference between the TRUTH and our OPINIONS, or we're not willing to MAKE a difference between the TRUTH and our OPINIONS, then we're not ready to be a teacher.
2. Second, Paul says he came to please God, not men. **(vs. 4-6a)**
- But what does he mean when he says, "Not as pleasing men?"
- a. It means using "flattering words" to win the favor of others. **(v. 5a)**
 - (1). Flattery is defined as, "To butter up, pander to, cater to..."
 - (2). Paul says he NEVER resorted to paying lip-service to people just to win their approval.

b. Nor did Paul use a "cloak of covetousness" – which is also translated, "a pretext for greed." **(v. 5b)**

(1). Paul is saying he had no "hidden agendas." He didn't try to win the approval of these brethren as a pretext for financial gain – for the purpose of keeping him on the payroll.

c. Nor did he seek glory from men. **(v. 6a)**

(1). In fact, Paul sought no glory at all.

(2). **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** – *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us – a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's*

sphere of accomplishment. But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

(3). Preachers and teachers are ESPECIALLY vulnerable in this area – it's easy to let well-meaning complements go to their head.

3. Third, Paul says he came in GENTLENESS, not making harsh demands. **(vs. 6b-7)**
 - a. If ANYONE had the right to make demands, it was Paul. But that's NOT what he did.
 - b. Instead, he was gentle, as a nursing mother. **(v. 7a)**
 - (1). There is no picture of tenderness and gentleness more beautiful than that of the nursing mother.
 - (2). Paul says he was NOT harsh, abusive, insensitive, demeaning, belittling, sarcastic, and caustic.
 - (3). RATHER he was gentle, tender-hearted, kind, merciful, compassionate, "sweet-tempered."
 - c. He was also LOVING ("as a nursing mother CHERISHES her own children"). **(v. 7b)**
 - (1). This word "CHERISHES" conveys "agape" love, and is the same word used in Ephesians 5:29 where Paul

described the kind of love husband should have toward their wives.

(a). **Ephesians 5:29** – *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and CHERISHES it, just as the Lord does the church.*

(2). The word CHERISH means to CULTIVATE, or to WARM (as a mother hen warms her chicks by bringing them under her wings).

(3). Paul ALWAYS sought to cultivate and bring out the best in the Thessalonians, NEVER doing anything that might attack or undermine their self-esteem.

4. Fourth, Paul says he came to share with them his LIFE, not just his words. **(v. 8)**

a. Paul's opened up his HEART to these brethren – he let them see BENEATH the surface of his life so they could know the REAL Paul.

b. This is the same thing he did at Corinth.

(1). **2 Corinthians 6:11-13** – *O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same(I speak as to children), you also be open.*

(2). **2 Corinthians 7:2** – *Open your hearts to us.*

c. Paul had NOTHING to hide.

(1). He was willing to reveal himself, imperfections and all. He was devoid of ANY false facade.

(2). He wore NO MASK. He was OPEN, and wanted them to know that he had STRENGTHS as well as weaknesses.

5. Fifth, Paul says he came to be a SPIRITUAL BLESSING, not a financial burden. **(v. 9)**

a. Paul was VERY ADAMANT about the right of preachers to be supported in their work.

(1). **1 Corinthians 9:1-12** – *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk*

of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?

- b. Brethren who are unwilling to properly support the preaching of the gospel of Christ need to ask themselves, "How long would I stay in my present job if they didn't pay ME a fair wage?"
 - (1). I know of a gospel preacher whose family of four "survived" because they would get damaged canned goods, and old produce, bread and sometimes dated frozen meats and fish out of the garbage dumpsters behind grocery stores.
 - (2). Someone will answer for THAT one on the day of judgment!

c. However, Paul was willing to forgo the right of being supported by Corinth to keep ANYONE from accusing him of abusing his authority.

(1). **1 Corinthians 9:15-18** – *But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.*

(2). Paul told the Corinthians, *"I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you."* (**2 Corinthians 11:8**)

(3). He accepted financial support from OTHER churches, *"taking wages of them,"* so NO ONE could say he was becoming a financial burden.

- (4). But when he FIRST came to Corinth, and before he began receiving support from "other churches," he supported himself as a tentmaker. **(cf. Acts 18:1-3)**
- d. Although Paul had EVERY RIGHT to receive wages from the brethren in Thessalonica, he chose to work with his OWN so he would NOT be a financial burden to these brethren.
6. And finally, the apostle Paul said he came as a POSITIVE EXAMPLE, and NOT a negative influence? **(v. 10-12)**
- a. Paul describes his conduct before them with the use of three words. He said he was:
- (1). Devoted - "Unworldly, Godly."
 - (2). Just - "Upright, honest, above-board."
 - (3). Blameless - "One against whom no charge of wrongdoing can be sustained."
- b. Furthermore, he CHARGED the Thessalonians (implored, pleaded with the Thessalonians) as a father does his own children.
- (1). He loved these brethren as a PARENT (mother and father), and he PLEADED with them and IMploRED them to "walk worthy of God." **(v. 12)**

CONCLUSION:

- I. Unless a teacher (or a preacher) is willing to follow THIS kind of example, it would be better if they DIDN'T teach (or preach).
 - A. We need to ALWAYS remember, God will judge us more closely.
 1. He will look at WHAT we preached – how we conducted ourselves toward the WORD.
 2. And He will also look at HOW we preached – how we conducted ourselves toward the WORK.

- II. If we're going to preach or teach, then we need to follow the example Paul left.
 - A. He came:
 1. Preaching the truth, not error. **(v. 3)**
 2. To please God, not men. **(vs. 4-6a)**
 3. In gentleness, not making harsh demands. **(vs. 6b-7)**
 4. To share with them his life, not just his words. **(v. 8)**
 5. To be a spiritual blessing, not a financial burden. **(v. 9)**
 6. As a positive example, not a negative influence? **(v. 10-12)**

- III. Do you have the spiritual qualities, the character and the dedication to teach?

- A. If you look at the spiritual qualities, character and dedication required of teachers and preachers, you'll see that these are all expected to be found in the life of EVERY Christian.
1. Perhaps a better way of asking this would be, are you willing to be judged by the Lord more strictly than others?
 2. If you're a faithful child of God, serving the Lord to the very best of your ability, and doing all you can to spread the message of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world, you should WELCOME an INTENSE, PENETRATING, ALL-ENCOMPASSING judgment.
 3. But if you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ (never been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins), or if you've done that but aren't living as faithfully as you know you should, then you aren't prepared for ANY judgment.
 4. Time is running out for all of us. Why not take advantage of God's amazing grace right now, and come to Him?