

**James 3:1-2**  
**“Perils for preachers”**

- I. Introduction**
- II. Vs. 1 Judged for content**
- III. Vs. 2 Judged for character**

**I. Introduction**

As already noted the James’ letter concerns itself with *the spiritual maturity of the believer*. He has brought forth *the truth that the maturity of the believer is seen on how* they do three things:

1. *Handle trials*
2. *Avoid temptation*
3. *Practice truth*

The third chapter of the letter brings what initially seems to be an unrelated topic. But upon closer examination this admonishment to teachers is a continuation of the general warning in 1:19 about being “*slow to speak*” as well as the warning in 1:26 to “*bridle the tongue*” along with the warning in chapter 2:14-26 “*about the substituting of mere words for works*”. The problem was compounded in the structure of the early church that was modeled after the synagogue where there were many unofficial teachers given wide latitude to speak. The Jews highly honored their instructors and the word Rabbi means, “*My Great One*”. It was taught that should your parents and your Rabbi both be kidnapped, and a ransom be demanded that it ought to be the Rabbi who is set free first and it was considered a blessing to provide for the needs of a Rabbi even above your own family. This was not an isolated problem in the early church that James writes about as the Apostle Paul had to bring it up in 1 Corinthians 3:4 when he mentions some of the congregation had *a carnal affiliation with their teachers* saying, “*For when one says, I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are you not carnal?*” Such esteem was not only

carnal for the church, but *it also created in the hearts of those who were ambitious the desire to be a teacher where they could acquire public attention and be thought of as intelligent and a great speaker or teacher to be admired.* Such ambition was fueled by the congregation's esteem as they were seen as wise and having position and authority. *Those teachers fell into a trap where their ambition made them increasingly more arrogant as they sought the applause of men. These teachers that James warns were of the type that the more they taught others the less they could be taught by anyone other than themselves and seeing how great they were at teaching they were no longer in need to learn!* They simply "*studied to teach and not to learn*"!

That is the background of this passage that we are about to look at and a simple outline of the passage will help us unlock its truths further for our own transformation albeit that the passage is most useful for pastor teachers like myself.

- I. Vs. 1-2 The warning: The perils for preachers
- II. Vs. 3-12 Three truths about the tongue: It is in this section that we will have more general truths for all to apply as we examine six-word pictures that are placed into three truths each containing two of the word pictures:
  - A. Vs. 1-4 *The bit and the rudder*: The tongues power to direct
  - B. Vs. 5-8 *The fire and the beast*: The tongues power to destroy
  - C. Vs. 9-12 *The spring and the fruit*: The tongues power to delight

### III. Vs. 1 Judged for content

Vs. 1 First, it needs to be mentioned that such an admonishment is being made by the writer who based upon verse 2; where he includes himself with the words, "*we all stumble in many ways*", is very aware of the seriousness of his calling. James is a teacher who is at this very letter warning other possible teachers about the perils of teaching. It is clear that James was well aware of *the lure to teach others* and while he does not wish to

discourage people from the calling to do so he does want to warn many from doing so for all the wrong reasons. There have always been people who “*get into ministry*” as Jesus has said “*to be seen by others*”. This ought to be a passage where those either in ministry or those who desire to be so, examine their hearts to see what lies behind their motivation. *Is it to serve Jesus and His people or to serve their own needs and insecurities?* Simply put I have no doubt that like Moses some need to be *driven to ministry*, but it is also true like in Simon the sorcerer others need to be *driven out of ministry*. I’m so thankful for the straight forth words of James about the realities of our calling to teach others as he mentions *two perils for preachers that are unavoidable*. In fact, *if we pass the first peril it is certain that we will not ever escape the second*. We first are warned by James that a person needs to consider carefully the God given responsibility to be “*diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” (2 Tim 2:15). The phrase “*let not many of you become teachers*” has been interpreted “*do not swell the ranks of the teachers*”. Paul recognized the God given calling upon those called to be teachers in Ephesians 4:11-12 as *given to the church for their equipping for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ*. What James wants to make sure is that the person called to do so never forgets the “*responsibility*” of their calling. The Bible teacher is a “*spiritual surgeon*” *as they are called to handle the word of God like a scalpel as it not only has the power over life and death but eternal life and eternal death in the Holy Spirit*. And with what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 that “*every idle word that men may speak we shall give an account of it on the day of judgment*” it is a very sobering calling! The *next thing* that James tells those who were teaching that *such*

**an occupation will be under eternal review** and **our actions with regards to this Holy pursuit will not escape judgment!** Before we take notice of what specific things will be judged we need to first determine what type of judgment James is referring too. The “*stricter judgment*” is in the context of **Devine** judgment as it is God’s word that we are to teach, and He alone has the right to judge those that are so called to dispense His Word by His power. But with that said the word used for judgment is “**krima**” in the Greek and it is **not used of adverse judgment while it is often used of an unfavorable outcome**. It is most likely referring to Bema seat or the judgment seat of Christ where the believers works and not their sin will be judged as the sin has already been judged on the cross of Christ. Paul wrote of such a judgment for all believes in 2 Corinthians 5:10 where he wrote; “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*” Paul also told the church in Rome in 14:12 that “*each of us shall give account of himself to God.*” While all in the church will appear before Jesus in this judgment James makes it clear that the bible teacher will be under greater scrutiny. With that as a background to the warning James is about to write he mentions two specific perils to preachers:

1. Vs. 1 **Content**: The first eternal review will be upon the content of what we teach. What we teach will be judged as it has the power to persuade people, to direct them and influence them. Jesus said that such teachers that cause one of these little ones to stumble it would be better for that teacher never to have been born. The teacher must be on guard to teach the truth not his opinion, stories or antidotes. He must not teach either his prejudices or presumptions. He must not lesson or add onto the truth even if it lessens his popularity. He must not teach his version of the truth but God’s version of it. The sobriety of this ought to strike the heart of anyone who thinks of doing such a calling in their own ambition to be seen of men. While it is a great privilege to answer the calling to teach the Word of God by the Spirit of God it is something that those of us called to do so should take seriously recognizing the threefold reality of the balanced work between

preparation, perspiration and inspiration!

#### IV. Vs. 2 Judged for character

2. Vs. 2 ***Character***: If we have taken seriously the first aspect of James warning and have prayed earnestly that what we have been studying has been rightly divided we will come to the second peril of all preachers in the words of James, “*For we all stumble in many things.*” It is hear that not a teacher save Jesus has ever been able to stand as there will in this life always be a huge gap between the truth I have been called to teach and my own lack of character. I am always the person who needs to apply the truths of the passage the most. It is a profound mystery how God can cause a man to understand what He is saying with great clarity and how little of that understanding I turn around and apply in my life. It isn’t as if I don’t hear the truth or understand the truth as I’m neither deaf nor ignorant...no I am just disobedient! James tells the teacher that not only his words are under review but what those words have produced in his life are also being judged. We bible teachers cannot say; “***Do as I say not as I do!***” Or character must be transformed by the words we study and are called to share. While no teacher except Jesus is faultless it ought to be the aim of every teacher that above merely communicating truth to other they ought to serve as an example as those that APPLY THE TRUTH in their own lives. We who say that the church needs to love one another do we who say such things indeed live one another.

James, does seem to recognize the impossibility of ever measure up to the perfection of the word of God when he adds “*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect or maturing man, able also to bridle the whole body.*” What he admonishes is that the teacher makes sure that they don’t mix their communication and contradict the clear teaching of the word by later speaking in ways that do not reinforce the truths they have just spoken. It is this teacher who having done so is able to direct their life around God’s word and not after the world.