

# Teaching The Truth

James 3:1-2

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:1-2 (ESV))

A man, very well known within these scriptures, once asked the Lord Jesus one of the most profound questions that any man could ask. He asked Jesus "What is Truth". "What is Truth"? Unfortunately, as we know from reading about the man and the circumstance taking place at the time he asked that question, he was not actually desiring to know real truth. His question was more a sigh of resignation than of interest. The man was Pontius Pilot, and shortly after asking the question, he crucified the very essence of "truth" itself, the Lord Jesus.

As we again think through this matter of being a teacher, and especially the stern warnings given to us here about the nature and the inclination of our tongues to go astray and foolishly debate about words that may or may not be God's actual intended meaning and application for them, may we use as our "focus" this word "truth". "Truth"!

We know very little about the man who asked Jesus this question about "truth", Pontius Pilot, only about his role in the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus. Perhaps Pilot had actually participated in discussions with some of the Roman philosophers of his day about such questions as this word "truth". I mention that because from our earliest recordings of history, men, calling themselves philosophers, have engaged in intellectual discussions and debates about important matters within their cultures, intellectual pursuits such as, "religion" and "politics" and "finance".

And we also find that this word "truth" has been one of the most prominent of their philosophical pursuits of understanding. And that pursuit has continued even to today, to know and to understand "truth".

But there is a subtle fallacy within most all of those pursuits that even the most brilliant of philosophers seem to miss, and that is, the word "truth" is more than simply one of the many debatable issues within the minds of men. Its meaning and its impact reaches to a whole other level from all those other debatable matters, like religion, and politics and finance. And perhaps that is why even to this day, philosophers have never been able to reach agreement about its meaning.

I can recall in my school days of the 1950's and 60's, our American culture was changing to a whole new "freedom of thinking". And philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and Sartre were among the philosophers whose beliefs captured the hearts and minds of young and vulnerable college students. Those and other men like them had formed philosophical concepts such as "existentialism" and that the belief that the meaning of "truth" was not "absolute", but was instead "relative", "what is true for you, may not be true for me, and what is true for me, may not be true for you". The resulting misguided conclusion was that each person must find their own personal and individual "pathway to truth".

And such beliefs as those have proven to have a ruinous impact on our society, defining and redefining even the most basic of our core values and intellectual thoughts. And while we may not want to have been affected by all those many philosophical influences, the hearts and souls and minds of most all of us who teach and preach today have been well trained by them, so much so that without our realizing we are doing it, we often include portions of their philosophies in the things we teach and preach.

I say all of this as a precursor to our further consideration of the warning given to us by the Lord concerning our teaching of other people, and specifically about our understanding and our teaching of these words of "truth" that are given to us here in these scriptures.

A reminder . . . this particular warning from God is not being given to unbelievers who worm their way into churches and try to teach their pagan beliefs. No, this particular warning is addressing those of us who do truly believe, and do teach and preach as a regular church involvement. And yes, as we have said, at one time or another we are all called to teach and preach this gospel. But this warning is especially addressing those of us who have a more regular involvement in teaching and preaching these truths of God. And may I add, this warning is even to those of us who do earnestly desire to preach and to teach only the "pure and holy truth", exactly as God has given it.

Why is this warning necessary? The reason is, and unfortunately so, all we have to do is listen carefully to the theology and doctrines that the most earnest of teachers and preachers are giving, and we will find widely differing versions of this "truth" being poured forth. And we can then clearly understand why God has given this warning that "not many of you should be teachers".

What am I talking about? I am talking about the fact that within just a mile or so of this church are several other churches. And though within each of our churches there are

devoutly believing Christians, we each teach and preach widely differing doctrines about faith and worship. There are Baptists, and Presbyterians, and Methodists, and Pentecostals and probably others, each sincerely believing that their theology and their doctrines are absolute “truth”. “Absolute “truth”! But yet, we vary so widely from one another.

And how has each of our churches gotten to where we stand today? It has come from this “teaching” that we are being warned about here in James 3!

And so, right at this moment there are teachers and preachers just like me standing before their congregations in those churches teaching and preaching differing versions of what we believe this bible reveals about “truth”. And again, all of this makes me want to cry out to God, “but what is the real truth?” And what is the “real truth” that you want me to give to these, my dear friends and brethren here in this church? God help me to teach the really right and exact “truth”!

May I pause for a moment and give us some of the most obvious differences in our varying definition of biblical truth? And I realize that you already are familiar with much of what I will say, but please bear with me as I verbalize some of these differences, just for the sake of clarity.

We as Presbyterians are generally known and defined by the word “Reformed”, meaning that we subscribe strongly to the belief that God is “Total Sovereign”. And we believe in “Providence” and in “Foreordination”, and in “Predestination”. And the tag, “Calvinists”, has been also been placed on us.

Our Methodist brethren generally subscribe strongly to beliefs such as those outlined within the Arminianism doctrines. Doctrines such as those that define a “freewill” path to salvation, to atonement and to the provision of “grace”. Those doctrines are in many ways similar to our Presbyterian doctrines, but they also, do widely differ with ours and also widely differ from the Baptist doctrines, focusing strongly on “methods” and practices to fulfill their worship of God.

And so also, the theology and doctrines subscribed to by our Baptist brethren are very similar in many ways to that of the Methodists and of the Presbyterians, but again with some wide differences. Doctrines that emphasize “freewill” are of utmost importance within most Baptist churches.

And then, as an off-shoot of the Methodist denomination, are our brethren in the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Following most of the basic doctrines of

Arminianism, our Charismatic friends give strong emphasis to certain of the “Spiritual Gifts”, and in particular, that of “Speaking in Tongues” and “Prophecy”.

Now, yes, each of our church groups have solid, born again Christians worshipping within them. And the doctrines we each teach and preach are based on pure scriptural text. But that leaves us with the question, how is it possible for each denomination to use the very same bible as our resource, and yet arrive at such wide-ranging variations in our beliefs?

And that question leads us back to this warning from the Lord that, “not many should be teachers”. Because the reason that our churches do differ widely in our doctrines and theology is that it has come through “teachers”, generation after generation of teachers and preachers, each applying their particular slant of understanding to the scriptures, and each generation of teachers carefully honing down certain particular points of doctrine, separating us further and further.

And we continue to do that even today, preachers and teachers, just like me, contribute to the problem by adding our comments to a particular portion of scripture. All of which then will sometimes divide believers even further, causing churches to split and form other churches. And all of it comes from this one thing that God warns us about, “teaching”.

With that being said, what are we supposed to do with this warning?

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1(ESV))

Obviously, from all that we have said so far, this dilemma is not an easy one to reconcile. If each teacher and preacher within all these many denominations and churches is faithfully reading and studying their bible, and faithfully pleading with the Holy Spirit to give them the absolute “truth” to preach and to teach to their congregations, but are still teaching and preaching widely varying theology and doctrines from one another, how will we ever be able to bring all of our congregations back to the real cornerstone of “truth” that these scriptures reveal?

I can’t know much about other teachers and preachers and why they teach and preach the things they do. I only know myself, and even then, not very well. But I do know me best, so I’ll address this dilemma from my personal limited perspective.

And the question that I usually ask myself is, “How can I get from where I am, to where I need to be”? “How can I get to the point where I am teaching and preaching the ‘real truth’ exactly as it is given within these scriptures?”

First of all, I know that I need to be firmly committed to the understanding that there is only one “real truth”. The philosophy that “what is true for you might not be true for me, and what is true for me might not be true for you”, is absolutely wrong and it is irreconcilable to “real truth”. “Real truth” is unique and it is “absolute” and it is given to us from only one source, and that is from within the pages of this bible! Nowhere else! Nowhere else!

And further, that every time I reach outside of these scriptures and pull in other materials to support the “truth” in these scriptures, corruption can, and very often does surely take place.

And further, I need to always remain committed to the understanding that these words of this Book are simply a revelation of the only “real truth” that is in existence, the very Person of the Lord Jesus. He said to us in John 14,

6 . . . "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6 (NASB))

Jesus is the “Truth”! And not that He gives us the “Truth”. He does that, but He is the actual “Truth” itself. And He has been the “Word of Truth” from the beginning. Listen to those words given in John 1,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5 (NASB))

And in verse 14,

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 (NASB))

Though you and I may not be able to comprehend this mysterious concept, Jesus truly is Himself the Word of God. And everything that we read throughout all the pages of this bible are a revelation of Him, Jesus, His person, His character and His plan for us. Jesus, He is “truth manifested”!

But how can I, a weak and corrupt soul, ever get into a condition where I am able to receive this “real truth” exactly as it’s given, and then pass it on to you, uncorrupted and unblemished by my own personality? May I admit to you that I really don’t know. And the realization that I really don’t know sparks great fear within my heart.

And so, my only avenue of hope is that as I study and prepare and give these messages, is that I will in each of those moments fully surrender my heart, my soul and my mind to the Person of the Holy Spirit.

And then, as Paul admonished Timothy, I must “accurately handle” these words of truth. And I must ever and always teach and preach the “whole counsel of God”, adding nothing to it and leaving nothing out. I must not be concerned about whether the “truth” offends you or hurts your feelings. But of first concern, I must with all diligence and fervor faithfully teach and preach these truths of God exactly as He has given them.

One last thought . . . I must ask you, my dear friends in the Lord, to always carefully consider the words that I give to you each week. And if the Holy Spirit gives you cause to question anything that I have said, you must love me enough to come to me about it. I need your help and guidance.

We’ll close with this admonishment from the Lord from 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. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.

(2 Timothy 2:15-16 (NASB))