

## Not Many Should Teach

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. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:1-12)

These words of verse 1 are so very important to me as I stand here before you each week. Listen to them again!

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)

These words still bring a special “fear” into my heart as I read them, because they speak a special word of caution directly from God’s Spirit into my own, warning me that each time I stand before you and preach and teach these truths, I had better preach and teach them exactly as God has given them within these scriptures, because I will surely be judged with greater strictness.

I must confess that I don’t know, even now, exactly what God means by His words “greater strictness”, but I do know that there is an ominous tone to the

words and that they are a warning, which is enough to keep fear as my watchguard.

I can recall when that "special fear" first came into my heart. It was sometime in the mid 1980s. I had been a Christian for over 10 years, and my family and I had been in the ministry at French Camp for several years, when I began to sense a strong "drawing" within my spirit towards "teaching" and "preaching" God's word.

And it was immediate that these very words of warning in this verse came to my mind.

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)

My first response was to back away from God's call. I knew that I did not have any of the traditional training that other preachers possessed. I had never been to a Bible College and I had not attended seminary. So, I had very little knowledge about the deeper things of theology and doctrine.

Yes, for my own benefit and for the benefit of my family, I had been studying the scriptures diligently. But I did not think myself to have nearly enough knowledge about God to teach Him and His ways to others. And so, I held back for over two years, all the while knowing that God was calling me, and urging me onward toward teaching and preaching. But for those two years, I kept remembering these words and was too fearful about the responsibility to step forward. . . .

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)

I can't recall now exactly what took place in my heart and mind to enable me to make the transition and to begin to step forward into the new calling. But folks, if you will look carefully at this verse of scripture, there is clearly another "unspoken side" to this stern warning that must be considered. And that is, if "not many people should become teachers", then the clear implication is that "some people really should and must become teachers".

And so, though still fearful, I knew that I must obey the call of God, no matter what may result. It was at that time that I made an agreement with the Lord, that if He called, I would go and preach and teach. I've never been sure if we "human creatures" should ever think ourselves to be on such a level that we can "make agreements" with God, but it was the only way that I knew to express myself to God, and so I did. I agreed that if He called, I would go and preach and teach.

And it was also a part of that agreement that if I was to go and preach and teach, then He, God, would need to enable my words, to give me His truths from His perspective. And that He Himself would need to be the "keeper" of my tongue, to keep my mouth from preaching and teaching words that were not His. And that is so even today! Every time I preach or teach or even simply involve myself in a bible study with other people, I ask the Lord to guard my tongue and let me think and say only the things He has given to me.

It was also about that time there in the mid 80s, that God led me to a better understanding about His "Spiritual Gifts" and how His "Spiritual Gifts" are especially given to enable and empower His people to think and to say and to do the things that He has called them to do.

And I especially became aware of the very big difference there was between God's "Spiritual Gifts" and the "natural talents" that are born into each of us, "talents" that we learn and can improve on through training.

Please bear with me for a moment as I make this contrast clear for us. Each of us knows all about "natural talents". We each have them and they are excellent and precious gifts from God. They enable each of us with abilities to do all the ordinary things of our day, in our homes and especially in our workplaces. Some people are especially good with their talents and they become very successful within their fields, corporate leaders, doctors, teachers, engineers, and on and on. And folks, many are housewives and mothers. And though their talents be less noticed by the public, they have talents that bless their families beyond measure.

But again, God has another category of knowledge and understanding and ability that He enables for His own special purpose, the purpose of carrying forward the special works of His kingdom here on the earth. And in these scriptures, He calls that enabling power, "Spiritual Gifts". And those "Spiritual Gifts" are very different from the "natural talents" that each of us has.

I spoke to us about "Spiritual Gifts" in a recent message. But would you please bear with me as I tell us about them again, because their importance is so necessary to the special "callings" that God gives to men and to women to carry forward the purposes of His kingdom here on this earth.

There are several of those special "Spiritual Gifts" and they can be found in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Romans 12, and in Ephesians 4. And may I begin by emphasizing that these special "Gifts" only come from the Holy Spirit, and they are given only to believers, and these specific "Gifts" are given to specific individuals as the Holy Spirit decides. And the "Gifts" are given specifically for the purpose of carrying out God's plan for "His Body", the church. He tells us that in 1 Corinthians 12. Please turn there with me and listen as I read!

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

And also, in Ephesians 4 we read

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith

and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14)

And then in Romans 12,

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.  
(Romans 12:3-8)

May I say again, as it is clearly spoken for us in verse 11 of 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit gives each of these "Gifts" to those that He specifically chooses. Listen again!

11 one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Every believer, you and I individually, are given one or more "Spiritual Gifts" to be used for the purpose of carrying forward the plans and purposes that God has made for His kingdom here on the earth. And if we are going to be obedient to His commands and get about the work of His kingdom, we really do need to recognize the special gift or gifts that have been given to us individually, and then to get about it.

And may I emphasize again that these "Gifts" are not "natural abilities", they are "supernatural" in every way, coming to us with a kind of "power" that we will never fully comprehend, power that will cause good and righteous things to take place in other people's souls as we minister our "gifts" to them. I still marvel daily at the manner in which these "Spiritual Gifts" enable a person to do and to say and to think things that they would not otherwise be able to do.

And looking back, I know that that was true for me. Before I began to sense the calling of the Lord to teach and to preach, I was never comfortable as a teacher. I had no “natural talent” for it. Yes, I had done some minor amount of teaching, but I didn't do it well.

But as I began to answer God's call to teach and preach His Word, I quickly realized that something was different from before. I was able to read and understand the scriptures better than I had ever done before. And I found that I was able to organize my thoughts and to present the scriptures in an orderly manner. And it was then that I realized that I could not boast of any of those abilities, but that it was God Himself who was enabling my abilities, using His “Spiritual Gifts”.

In those first days, God was generous to me in that He started me off slowly in this new calling. Oftentimes, the local churches would need someone to speak for them when their pastors would be ill or on vacation. And most of them knew that French Camp had some men available to speak. And again, I started slowly, once a month or so, and then it became more often. And I was able to have those opportunities without any interference with my work at the school.

And again, it was in those beginning days of my occasional speaking at the local churches that I began to realize more and more just how God was enabling my abilities through His “Spiritual Gifts”.

I confess that I was continually being surprised by the changes that were taking place in my mind and in my soul. I knew very well that I was not as learned as my words often made me seem to be. Again yes, I was doing my part and studying diligently, but my study didn't account for all the things I was learning and saying.

And I came to realize that God's plan was very comprehensive in that He matched my preaching and teaching abilities with particular people who could learn from me. In other words, not everyone can listen to me and learn from me. God has called and equipped other preachers and teachers for those people. Isn't that a wonderful thought? Folks, God's guiding hand is in

everything we think and say and do, but we can only recognize His guiding Hand if we are truly surrendered to Him.

May I give an additional word of caution about those whom God has called to teach and to preach. As we read these scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, we find prophets and teachers and preachers all through them, each diligently giving God's word to whomever God has assigned them.

One phrase that almost brings a chill to my heart each time that I read it is the phrase "Thus saith the Lord". It was a common expression used by Old Testament Prophets to add the right and proper authority to the words they would be speaking.

But I came to realize that whether or not I said those words, "Thus saith the Lord", each time that I represent God in my capacity as a teacher and as a preacher, every time I stand in a pulpit, those words "Thus saith the Lord" are implied. Every time that I teach a Sunday School lesson, the implied authority and accuracy and truthfulness is "Thus saith the Lord". And I had better have it right, else I am stepping on the wrong toes.

And so, I continually have to remind myself of this warning here in verse 1 of James 3,

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)

May I go one more step further. As for myself, even as one of you might privately seek my counsel or ask a question about a particular scripture, these words still apply. In my capacity as pastor, and preacher and teacher of God's word, I must always be careful to respond from the authority of "Thus saith the Lord".

And may I pass that same warning on to you? As you and a family member, or you and a friend, find yourselves discussing one of the matters of scripture, you

also must be careful to always give the “biblical” truth found here in these scriptures. As Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15,

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(2 Timothy 2:15)

As you find yourself uttering the words, “well, I believe thus and so” about something, please do make sure that you are not just giving your “opinion” on a matter, but rather are “rightly dividing the word of truth”. You must be careful, else, you may influence your family member or your friend wrongly. And God will surely hold you accountable for your words.

One more thought on this verse,

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In some senses, you and I are always teachers. As parents and grandparents, every moment is a “teaching moment” with our children and grandchildren. Whether we are uttering words or just exhibiting behaviors, we are “teaching” them. Too often, we forget that little eyes and little ears are attuned to our words and behaviors, and we are teaching them things that we might never have intended. We must always be careful!

A final thought about this command from God

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)

May I encourage you to not be warned away completely from teaching by these words. God may have given you the “Spiritual Gift” of teaching. If He has, He surely intends for you to use it. It may be in a “small group” bible study or some other similar opportunity. Please do search your hearts and determine which of the “Spiritual Gifts” God has given to you and then use your “Gifts” diligently. God will be pleased!



Listen as we close . . .

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8)