

## 02.27.11 / James 3:1

**Passage Insight**

In the previous chapter, James has just finished reminding followers that the fruit of our lives displays the true roots of our faith. He continues this theme in a sense with this first verse in chapter 3 by implying that one who teaches a certain duty must also be bound to adhere to that duty himself. In other words, for those who teach, their actions will reveal the genuineness of their faith.

At the time that this was written, the position of teaching was in some sense desirable merely because the position of teacher was in part a position that garnered attention. This is true today as well, and while many would want to be up front in response to a genuine call of the Spirit, others would certainly seek this position in an attempt to feel better about themselves. At the heart of this is a desire to find worth and value not only in a position, but in comparison to others. In other words, when I feel more important than you, in my mind I become more valuable than you, and so I feel better about myself. Scripture speaks strongly against this in Philippians 2:3, where it says, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” We see the clearest example of this in Christ Himself in Philippians 2:5-8, which says,

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

The long and short of it is that we must check our hearts as we seek to serve others and make sure that it is out of genuine obedience, for this is what our Lord does.

It should be noted that James is speaking not just of the apostolic office, but more loosely of anyone who professes to have knowledge and understanding enough to share it publicly with others. The implication here is that any person who professes to have a clear understanding of the duty of a Christian is that much more bound to adhere to it. This is not to say on any level that teachers must earn God’s favor by teaching accurately – grace certainly applies to those who mistakenly teach incorrect doctrine – but rather that the fruit of our lives displays the roots of our faith, as we mentioned above. This is a common theme in James. For more on this, a study on James 2:14-26 would be most helpful. Note the humility seen in verse 1 as James includes himself in this condemnation, saying that he too is subject to the same strict judgment regarding those who teach. Incidentally, the judgment spoken of here is not a negative judgment, but merely a rendering of decision based on the examination of the facts. In other words, our actions reveal the source of our faith and the intent of our hearts, plain and simple.

On the topic of calling, we are not all called to teach. Consider the teachings on the body of Christ. Galatians 3:27-28 reminds us that within the body of Christ, we are all united by Him and are one in Him. In the body, no one is inherently more valuable than anyone else. We all have our value in the one thing that ties us together, the Spirit of God living inside of us. As such, our value doesn’t come from our role or our gifts, but rather from our identity as people ransomed by God. This truth drives us away from seeking positions of influence because we think they’re better than other positions and will therefore make us feel better, and instead it drives us TOWARD simple obedience to the Lord and a willingness to serve Him wherever He has called us, whether in the pulpit or in the pasture. Practically speaking, it would be wise to ask the Lord where we are to serve and to ask others in the body as well.

A call to teach is a call to selflessness and reliance on God. Though these are the goals of all Christians – or at least they should be – for those who teach, there is additional weight given the practical impact of a person in a public position. If someone ever preaches out of a motivation to garner attention for himself, he should be rebuked. Should this drive teachers to cower and speak timidly so as never to make a mistake? In no way. Here’s why. We are called to speak the Word of God with all boldness. We are also called along with everyone else to multiply our talents, and this doesn’t happen by casting a small net or throwing a small pebble into the lake. If we fail or occasionally and mistakenly speak untrue words, we too may rest in the grace that Christ gives to those who call on Him, and when we fail, we should seek to correct any errors in our teaching after the fact. As we teach boldly, we may confidently open our lives for examination with the hope that the fruit born by our lives is evidence of a faith that is rooted and grounded in Christ, and that as we are judged more strictly, we are found to be faithful to Him.

### Application Questions / Prayer

#### Actions Reveal the Depth of Our Words

- 1) Tell about a time when you made bold claims about what we should do as Christians.
- 2) Such claims put us in the spotlight and invite critique. What sort of pressure did you then feel to measure up to the claims you made?
- 3) This is not necessarily bad. It’s simply a matter of what happens in the public forum. How can this truth (that when we make claims about what Christians should be) drive us to deeper obedience as we speak the gospel to others?

#### Finding Our Role In the Body of Christ

- 1) As Christians, we are given certain gifts to use to build up one another and to reach out to those who don’t follow Jesus. Given this passage, what should our mind- and heart-set be as we seek to know our place?
- 2) According to Scripture, what are some of the gifts that the Lord gives us so that we can serve others?
- 3) What are some of the dangers of seeking to serve in areas to which we’re not called and for which we’re not properly equipped?

#### Selfish Ambition

- 1) Where in your life have you taken some sort of action for selfish motivation or selfish ambition?
- 2) What was the outcome?
- 3) How were others affected?
- 4) How were your motives exposed?
- 5) Looking back, what course of action would have been more honoring to the Lord?

### Sources

- Prayer
- The Bible Exposition Commentary
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Bible Reader’s Companion
- A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments
- A Handbook on the Letter from James