

Earning the right to be heard

God's Ideal Gospel Teacher (Jas. 3)

Intro: The local church is looking for teachers for the Bible classes. Who is qualified to teach? Someone suggests a brother because he is a good public speaker, he never lacks words for any occasion, wouldn't he be an obvious choice? Another decides that a certain brother or sister has not been showing much interest lately; maybe a class would get them coming regularly? Is this sensible? Brother has always had ambitions to control every organization he has been apart of; he was head of a local civic; he is the coach of the baseball team and president of the school PTA; he enjoys being in the lime-light and having the final say on what goes on! He promotes himself as teacher for the auditorium class and is working very hard to make sure he is picked and not another brother in the church. Would we want him up front? All of these scenarios may be common in our day. But would they be good choices?

In God's kingdom, all who lead others must be qualified for their realm of service by the word of God. Just as there are qualifications for who can be a Christian, an elder or a deacon, would we not expect that there are also "qualifications" for being a teacher? But where can these qualifications be found? For an answer, let's turn to James chapter three.

Every person who aspires to the role of a teacher of God's word should be aware of the proper motivation, preparation, and methodology in presenting God's word. In a larger sense, it is an issue we all need to think about because every disciple is a teacher of men. James in chapter three gives us the principles that govern the role of the teacher. He shows us very clearly how we earn the right to be heard.

God's ideal gospel teacher:

Recognizes the seriousness of the role of teaching

James starts with a command that at first may appear to be defeating the purposes of God! "Let not many become teachers", v. 1.

The Greek text indicates "stop doing this"! James addresses a real and current condition. The word here is not despotes (master of servants), but didaskalos (one who teaches others).

However, we should not conclude from James antithetical style that James is discouraging people from wanting to teach.

Our salvation depends upon it. We need every Christian to aspire to teach the word to others (Mt. 28:18; 2 Tim. 2:2)

It is part of our spiritual maturation (Heb. 5:12).

Instead, James urges us to enter into the role of teaching with soberness realizing that we shall receive a "greater condemnation".

One should never enter into a role of teaching without prayerfully realizing the seriousness of the task. We increase our opportunities to stumble when we take on the role of teacher. If we lack the proper maturity, we risk being vulnerable to additional sins of speech. And in

this sense, we are subject to "a greater condemnation". The Greek word here, *krima*, indicates primarily judgment or condemnation for sin and the adjective means what is comparatively greater. The idea is that we enter a role of greater accountability and greater judgment if we sin with our tongues or lead others away from God.

Every day we have occasions to share the word with others, to fulfill our role as teachers. Do we take these opportunities as seriously as we should?

What if we resort to light-hearted jabs that make it appear that we are not serious about spiritual things? Teaching souls is too important to make it a joking matter.

Those lost in sin and error deserve a prolonged and carefully thought out presentation of truth rather than a one-minute bottom line lecture. Often we do more damage to the cause of Christ by giving people condemning opinions about what we think rather than real reasons to believe! Teaching is too important and serious to short-change the lost man with inadequate evidence that either confuses or prejudices him. Sometimes the best response is to say. "This is a very important question and I want to have time to discuss it thoroughly with you. When could we get together to study the Bible to see what God says about it?"

So we earn the right to be heard by revealing a concerned heart for the lost and not a casual desire to prove oneself right!

Has learned to control his tongue.

James explains that a great part of the danger in teaching has to do with that untamable part of our anatomy, the tongue. It is the teacher's "tool-of-trade"; and that in and of itself raises the possibilities of sin. So, James warns of the dangers of misusing the tongue.

He speaks of:

It is difficult to control. James seems to say it is the last area we conquer. When we learn to control our speech we have learned to control the whole body as well and have reached spiritual maturity! It has great potential for damage. Though little, it has tremendous potential for evil. Like bits and rudders, it boasts great things. The tongue may sway great multitudes; it has brought about the destiny of nations. Just as a ravaging forest fire begins with a single spark, so the tongue may also start a spiritual conflagration that may not be easily put out! "And only you can prevent forest fires!" James likens it to a devastating fire, a world of iniquity, a source of defilement for the whole body, the source of destructiveness that gets its initial spark from hell itself! A deadly serpent that kills its prey (v. 8);

It may be used inconsistency. With this remarkable part of our bodies we may sing praises, pray pious prayers, speak truth or with it we may curse and abuse men. No other part of the creation acts this way. A fountain (spring) does not send out two kinds of water. A fig tree does not produce two kinds of fruit, figs and olives. A salt lake doesn't

produce fresh water. But the tongue may produce both good and evil things. It may produce what it was not created to produce.

So then we must beware of the dangers of the tongue itself as we teach. Who has earned the right to be heard? Is it not those whose language indicates that they are trustworthy with their speech, who are mature enough to realize the dangers wrong speech injects into Bible discussion?

Do we have control over our speech? Can we discuss the Bible without resorting to angry exchanges or sarcasm that engenders anger and strife? Can we discuss the Bible without insulting those with whom we disagree rather than treating them with kindness and respect? If not, we best stay quiet and not teach, until we can control ourselves better.

A good rule is to talk to people in such a way that the door is open for further discussion rather than slammed shut for all others! Critical and judgmental statements have often closed the door forever with people who've had an angry encounter with a well-intentioned but unwise member of the church of Christ.

Has proven his wisdom by his good life.

Who do we really want to teach us? The answer is, a man who is wise and understanding. But that's where the problem is. How do we know such a man? It is not every man who aspires to teach. It is not the man who has the greatest grasp of Biblical facts.

Among the Jews, earning the title "rabbi" was considered a great honor and the title "sophos" (wise man) was a coveted description. It appears that these Jewish Christians had not successfully conquered these yearnings.

Ambitious people could see teaching as a quick way to power or self-glorification.

James speaks of two inner motivations and their results:

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition ("politicking") resulting in disorder and evil.

Meekness of wisdom resulting in the peaceable sowing of truth.

"Meekness" here again stands in contrast to bitter jealousy and ambition. Perhaps we might define it here as "strength under control".

An attitude of deliberate acceptance. Their objective is not advancement of themselves but of the will of God. They want to see the fruit of righteousness in others and they choose methods that result in peaceable discussion of the word.

Do we seek position or do we want to serve God? Do we create an atmosphere of peace and order or chaos and conflict?

James speaks of two kinds of "wisdom".

The former are characterized by a wisdom from below.

earthly--Of the earth

sensual--having to do with the natural disposition of the soul

devilish--having to do with demons

the result is akatastasia (disorder), turmoil and anarchy (cf. Lk. 21:9). Such ambition self-promotion leads the church to disorder and division rather than unity and peace.

The latter are characterized by a wisdom from above.

First pure--(hognos) clean, uncorrupted, holy

Peacable--(eirenike) resulting in peace, thus striving for harmony, rather than conflict; and note that order! First pure then peacable.

Gentle--(epieikes) moderate, considerate of others and patient with them even when they are not their best.

Reasonable--(eupeithes) compliant to the will of God, the opposite of obstinate and self-seeking

Full of mercy and good fruits--Doing what is right, always ready to help others

Unwavering--(adiakritos) alpha privative and to distinguish, Cf. 1:6 not dubious, ambiguous, uncertain

Without hypocrisy--(anupokritos) without pretense or sham

We may know then who the truly wise man is. v. 13. It is the man whose life demonstrates these characteristics.

How do we gain credibility with those we hope to teach? Do our lives demonstrate that we have more than knowledge?

Thus James sums up his discussion of the teaching with a powerful sentence: "the seed" (the word of God) whose fruit is righteousness (the result of teaching) is sown in peace (method) by those who make peace (motivation).

Conclusion: Anyway can take the occasion to talk; but God wants us to earn the right to be heard! Let's communicate the word with soberness, with self-control, and with the demonstrable proof of wisdom in how we live every day. When we have earned the right to be heard, people around us will listen!