

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 3:1-2

James 3:1

(KJV) My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

(NIV) Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James 3:2

(KJV) For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

(NIV) We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

When James wrote this to the scattered Jewish Christians, many new believers were eager to stand at the front of the synagogue and teach—a practice that was synonymous with Jewish culture and therefore not discouraged. As each self-professed teacher came forward one after the other to showcase their spiritual gift, the pulpit became a platform for—and gave licence to—every wind of false doctrine and carnal expression. Faith without works indeed! James chimes in to remind the Jewish Christians not to be so eager to teach, for God would judge strictly anyone who represented Him and His Word, and who then had influence—for good or evil, truth or deception—over His people.

Indeed, it is usually the tongue—the teacher’s primary communication tool—that betrays the heart:

Luke 6:45

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

For this reason, James targets the tongue in this passage, along with the essential character of the possessor of that tongue. God not only calls teachers to teach, but to live what they teach—combining faith and works—and to be godly examples to His children whom they influence and oversee:

1Peter 5:1-3

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Two other critical passages in the New Testament give spiritual leaders specific character qualifications that need to be formed and/or forming in the lives of potential ministers of God's Word:

Titus 1:5-9

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

James wants us to know that the gift of teaching—and every position of spiritual leadership and influence—comes with conditions of time, character, and maturity. This is so that by our presumption God's name is not dishonoured and His Word is not maligned.

We want God to be glorified!

~ Reverend Darren McClelland