The Power of the Tongue Part 1: A Warning for Teachers

James 3:1

**“Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we *who are teachers* will incur a stricter judgment.”**

Good morning to you all. Please open your Scriptures to the third chapter of the Epistle of James. Today we are looking at the first verse of the third chapter as we attempt to lay the foundation for the next topic James will be discussing in his letter. He is beginning a section of instruction regarding the power of the tongue. When thinking about the human body there are so many ways that God has shown His creativity and intelligence in how He has structured our physical bodies. Every part of the body has a purpose meaning that everything God has created He has created for a purpose. The tongue is the part of the body used for speaking and for eating. It is one of the most interesting parts of the body because as James will inform us it can be used for both blessing and cursing others. Have you ever heard this question asked: “Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?” We hear this usually when someone says something very vulgar or profane and the person asking the question is wondering if the same mouth can possibly kiss the mother that was used to utter such a profane thought. Today we will be discussing the first part of the power of the tongue as James begins to explain its power. The topic today has to do with those who carry the title of teacher in the church. James is warning his readers that not many people should carry this title, nor should they desire to without taking seriously the position they hold in the church. Today’s message will be mostly dealing with the role of the teaching elder in the church (the Pastor). May the Word of God enlighten all of us and help us to consider greatly the enormity of the role of teaching in the church of God.

As we begin we read in this verse that the warning being delivered here is that anyone who carries the title of teacher will be held to a higher standard on the day of judgment by God. The importance of delivering the good news of the gospel accurately carries with is the eternal destiny of all who hear. When someone takes the role of Pastor over a congregation the eternal destiny and salvation of the entire people in the church hinge upon the way in which the gospel is proclaimed. James wants his readers to know that this role should be taken seriously and those listening must always be on guard against heretical teaching.

Another points he makes is that it should not be the desire of just anyone to want to become a teacher, especially if the person desiring to do that has the wrong motives. With the words the teacher speaks he/she can either lead people to God or cause them to reject Him. Teachers in Greek is pronounced *Didaskaloi* and was the title given to Rabbis or anyone who held an official title of teacher or preacher. Scripture says that people should not shy away from wanting to teach the gospel, but they must be aware that their teaching will hold them to a stricter judgment by God. Therefore, the teaching that is done must be in accordance with God’s Word and not lead people to embrace false doctrines.

According to Scripture, what are the qualifications to hold the title of teacher in the church? Today we will look carefully at these establish the importance of why teachers play such a vital role in the health of the church. Qualifications: Paul’s first letter to Timothy outlines what a teacher elder’s qualifications are. Please turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3. The first office he speaks of is the overseer or teaching elder. “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, 3 not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil” (vv. 2-7). As being part of the church family each of you is expected to hold anyone who teaches from the pulpit to these standards. The title of Pastor is very sacred and must be respected as such. I ask that you help me in this position to continually be held to these standards.

Not only are their qualifications to hold the office of elder, but Scripture also mentions that not all people in the church are called to be teachers. There are other roles just as important for the well-being of the community and the congregation. These roles are those who handle the church’s finances, the secretary, the church council, the music leader, those who assist with the liturgy and the collection of offering as well as distribution of the Lord’s Supper and those assisting with the media. Everyone who attends church has a role to play in what happens every Sunday. Each of these roles is essential and without them the church would not be able to fulfill its number one priority which is to equip the saints for the building of the Kingdom of God. If the leadership is not following the teaching of Scripture, but rather pursuing their own desires then the church cannot do its work effectively. One such example comes from the book of Acts chapter 6 2-4 “So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” What we learn is that those who serve others by waiting tables or sharing God’s love with others are just as important as those who teach the Word of God. All the roles performed in church matters, but not all people should desire to hold the title of teacher because it comes with a stricter standard.

Now that we have established what the qualifications are for teachers, now we need to discuss what Scripture says regarding the quality of the teaching itself. Let us look at a few examples from Scripture that will show us what we need to watch out for regarding the information being presented by teachers. Let us begin by returning to 1 Timothy. In chapter 1 verses 3-7 Paul instructs Timothy “Just as I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, to remain on at Ephesus so that you would instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrines, 4 nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to useless speculation rather than advance the plan of God, which is by faith, so I urge you now. 5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith. 6 Some people have strayed from these things and have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.” The teacher or overseer must be willing to protect the congregation from heretical teachings and to teach the people the truth from God’s Word with love. Also, teachers must study the Word and be able to effectively communicate that for the church family. The church cannot flourish if it is not fed the good food of God’s Word.

Our second example comes from the Epistle of Jude, the second to the last book in the Bible. The Epistle of Jude is aimed at warning the people of God that they need to be alert regarding the false teachers infiltrating the church. Starting with verse 8 Jude writes “Yet in the same way these people also, dreaming, defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak abusively of angelic majesties.” A false teacher rejects the authority of Scripture and rather attempts to focus his listeners on the flesh and other magical sources of wisdom. He continues in verse 10 “But these people disparage all the things that they do not understand; and all the things that they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.” This verse is saying that there are many teachers of Scripture who do not know the Scripture very well and therefore distort the truth by their lack of knowledge. If any preacher or teacher is not using Scripture as the basis for their teaching you should stay clear of that teaching. This is more of a self-help or motivational speaking, not teaching God’s Word. Finally in verse 16 he writes “These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.” When I think of this I think of some preachers I have heard who make outrageous claims like they have not sinned since becoming a Christian or that they have a special revelation and are consulted by God. They say these things to win thew approval of man and they use these claims to make new assertions about God which have not been established in Scripture. If you ever hear these things avoid such teachers because they are profaning the name of God.

**Now what does all of this have to do with the tongue?**

What we will continue to investigate as we traverse through chapter 3 is that the tongue is a weapon of our body that can have devasting effects on our lives. James has already mentioned in chapter 1 verses 19 and 26 when he says that “You know this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Now everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger;” He made it abundantly clear that listening before speaking is a virtue that belong to those who are genuine followers of Christ because this behavior shows humility rather than an arrogant attitude. In verse 26 he said, “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” Therefore, controlling what we say is a sign of being a genuine follower of Christ as well. The main idea of all we have discussed today is this: A genuine follower of Christ will be careful to teach only that which is true according to sound doctrine outlined in Scripture. To speak anything else is blasphemy and will be held in account by God on the day of judgment. Anyone who takes the title of teacher must be ready, willing, and able to heed this warning and understand that every word they speak carries the blood of their listeners on their hands.

**5 Ways to Recognize a False Teacher by Thom Rainier**

(https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-warning-signs-of-false-teachers/)

1. Contradicting Scripture. Often, these contradictions affect the meaning of the gospel. This is how Satan works. Distort the gospel just enough so it’s not really the gospel. People will notice if the message is way off, but they won’t notice as much if the message contains just enough truth to appear as truth while being false.

2. Adding or removing from Scripture. False teachers add to Scripture to control the behavior of others. The motive is often power. Other false teachers will remove from Scripture to live as they want and participate in otherwise prohibited behavior. The motive is often selfishness.

3. Claiming special knowledge on your behalf. I cringe when I hear, “God told me to tell you this.” Or even worse, “Only I get this information from God.” Is it possible God speaks through others to you? Yes. But someone claiming unsolicited special knowledge on your behalf is always a red flag.

4. Claiming a different source other than Scripture for God’s messages. Your emotions are a terrible source of God’s truth. Other religious texts are not equal to the Bible. Cults attract people with both tactics: emotional appeals and another so-called sacred text.

5. Making money the message more than Jesus. Please, preach and teach generosity, sacrificial giving, and tithing in your church. But do not forget that a love of money disqualifies one from ministry.

**What should we do?**

As we conclude today’s message let us take a few moments to discuss what this means for us as a church family. As I have said many times before we must remember that God has established the church to fulfill the great commission which is to make disciples of Christ throughout all the nations and to teach what He gave to us in His Word. If the church is to be blessed by God and continue in this work the teaching that comes from the pulpit as well as those in the church must be sound doctrine based upon the words of God found in Scripture. One of the reasons I ask for comments after sermons is so that those who have listened may interact with my comments and with the Scripture. Questioning a teacher is how both the teacher and the student can learn from each other. Encouraging open dialogue and discussion among the family of God is healthy because that is where we grow in faith together. Each one of you is a valued member of God’s kingdom and therefore your comments and sharing of your experiences are welcomed and treasured by the church. May we always be willing to encourage and challenge each other to grow and remain in the faith.

When Katie and I joined you in November last year we came with a sense of excitement for the new experience, but we also came with the sense of responsibility knowing that the well-being of the church would be based upon the teaching provided from the pulpit. Every week when we gather may we not be focused on anything else but the proclaiming of the truth from God’s Word and making Christ known in this community. The light showing from this place will bless others if we maintain a commitment to God’s Word. It is both a privilege and an honor to serve with you in this capacity and we look forward to working with you in the years ahead to share the love of God with everyone in this community. Let us pray.