

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

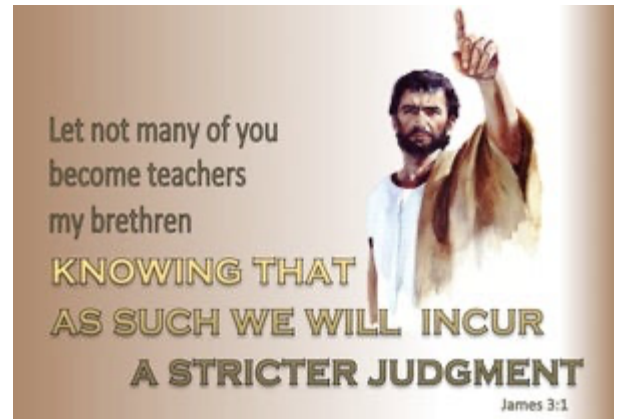
Lesson: 21

Text: 3:1-10

Date: 8-6-23

Trinity Lutheran Church - Pastor David Nehrenz

www.tlcnorman.org



TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

- (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.

(1 Ki 8:46; Ps 39:1; Prov 10:19; 20:9; Eccl 7:20; Mt 12:37; 23:1-33; Lk 11:45,46,52; Ac 13:1; Rom 2:20,21; 3:9-20; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Gal 1:8,9; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 1:7; 1 Pet 3:10; 1 Jn 1:8)

- (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.

(Ps 12:3,4; 32:9; 57:4; 73:8,9; 120:2-4; Prov 16:27; Mt 5:22; 15:11-19; Mk 7:14-23; Lk 16:23; Jn 8:44)

- (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.

(Ps 140:3; Eccl 10:11; Rom 3:13)

(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.

(Gen 1:26-28; 1 Cor 11:7)

Though Jesus’ chief purpose in His incarnation was giving His life as a ransom, He functioned among the people and the disciples as preacher and teacher. He was the only Revealer of the divine (Matt. 7:28-29). Jesus also understood that officially recognized teachers would have the obligation of perpetuating what He did after He was gone (Matt. 28:20) and that those holding the office would have a higher degree of accountability before God at the judgment. James’ warning concerning the seriousness in which teaching was to be exercised reflects Jesus’ warning in the Sermon on the Mount: “Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches (*didachē*) men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).¹

The warning in the Sermon about correct teaching comes immediately after the promise of Jesus to maintain the prophetic written revelation in its totality. The divine Word, with alphabetical precision, as it was given, shall remain in place even on the Day of Judgment and can be tampered with by the appointed teachers only at the eschatological risk of receiving the least favorable verdict at that time. James’ rendition seems to be dependent on the

In Jerusalem the clergy are called “the apostles and the elders” (Acts 15:6) and in Antioch “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1). In Eph. 4:11 Paul calls this same type of group “pastors and teachers.” The selected terms referring to the clergy seem to be determined by the function the writer is emphasizing. They are called “prophets” if the kerygmatic or preaching function is stressed. “Teachers” puts the stress on their function of maintaining the doctrinal heritage as it was given them by Jesus through the apostolic tradition. James, like Jesus, gives a severe eschatological warning to those who have the teaching or doctrinal obligations of the clerical office. If derelict, their offense is tantamount to tampering with the divinely given Word itself and making the revelation of no value.

James’ admonitions concerning the proper use of the tongue has its specific target in the clergy,³ but the general arguments are by extension, of course, applicable to all Christians. The reference to the perfect man who is able to refrain from sinning or from making mistakes when he speaks follows James’ warning about too quickly assuming the task of explaining Christian doctrine. He is not speaking about absolute sinlessness or even proposing it as a possibility. In the first part of this very verse James rules out any possibility that Christians can avoid sin in their lives, but it is possible for them to avoid making mistakes in their official speaking as preachers. The preacher who properly conveys the divine message is called “a perfect man.” Several problems are presented here. What are meant by sinning, making mistakes, and a perfect man? Since all make mistakes, a perfect man cannot be one who overcomes sin in his life. In the light of 3:1 with its special warning for teachers, a perfect (*teleios*) man would be one who conforms his teachings as pastor to the words of Jesus. Perfection here describes not so much the moral quality of the person, but rather the understanding of God’s mind, from which perspective he refrains from bringing down curses upon those redeemed by God (3:10). He not only understands God’s loving attitude to men, but is able to express it in his preaching and teaching. He resembles the wise man in the Sermon on the Mount who builds his house on a sure foundation (Matt. 7:24-25).

LIFE APPLICATION

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”
Why are pastors and teachers held to a higher standard?