

“The Teacher’s Conundrum”

July 15, 2012

Text: James 3:1-2

I have entitled the passage we will consider this morning=>

“The Teacher’s Conundrum.”

A conundrum is an intricate/difficult problem.

It’s not just an enigma, which is a perplexing/baffling idea.

You can be baffled about an enigma & just let it lie there,
as an unsolved riddle, & there’s no harm done.

But a conundrum is a personal problem that you must solve
in spite of the inherent difficulties in doing so.

The conundrum faced by every Xn teacher has to do w/ the
standoff between God’s extremely high standards for
teachers, in understanding/applying the Word to their lives,
a/w/a the lives of other people.

And their own human frailty and tendency to stumble into
sin, esp. the sins of speech.

As James will put it in Jms 3:10=> *“From the same mouth
come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these
things ought not to be this way.”*

If they ought not to be this way for any Xn, they really
ought not to be for any teacher of God’s Word.

Listen for this conundrum teachers face in today’s text itself=>

Jms 3:1-2=> *“Let not many of you become teachers, my
brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a
stricter judgment. / For we all stumble in many ways.*

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”
If he can bridle his tongue, which, as a teacher, he uses all the time, he can bridle any other part of his body, restraining it from sin.

That’s because the tongue is almost unrestrainable.

Monday of this week, I struggled w/ my own unbridled tongue.

I was using a chainsaw to cut down some large bushes, when the chain grew dull.

I had a spare sharpened chain w/ me, but I’d forgotten to bring the box-wrench necessary to make the switch.

I was tired, but I really wanted to finish the job that day.

I drove over to a garage that had the wrench I needed, but because the temperature in the garage was 109, I did the job as fast as I could & got out—too fast, as it turned out.

I didn’t notice until I got back to the bushes that I’d put the new chain on backward, & now once again, I didn’t have the wrench to reverse it.

When I tried unsuccessfully to make a cut with the chainsaw, frustration surged up w/i me, my tongue flung off its bridle, & I’m ashamed to say, I yelled, “Darn!”

I gave up, & started studying our text, about teachers incurring stricter judgment as they stumble over their unsanctified tongues.

There I was, face-to-face, w/ the “teacher’s conundrum.”

Paul must have felt this problem deeply as he wrote 2 Cor 4:

*“God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. / But we have this **treasure in earthen vessels**” (4:6-7).*

We preachers/teachers have been entrusted w/ the treasure of the light of the knowledge of God’s glory, but we carry it around in common old faulty clay pots—ourselves.

We are those “*earthen vessels*.”

That’s no excuse for failing to carry it well, to God’s people.

And if we do fail, we will incur stricter judgment than those who haven’t received this privilege/responsibility.

We are under a double obligation to proclaim the truth of God’s Word with accuracy, neither taking anything away from it, nor adding anything of our own to it.

Today’s text presents the 2 sides of the teacher’s conundrum:

- * Teachers are judged more strictly than others,
- * But teachers themselves stumble, like others.

*** Teachers Are Judged More Strictly Than Others**

[James 3:1]=> *“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.”*

James was addressing a problem in the churches to which he was writing=> too many people wanting to be teachers, who were not qualified to do so.

This problem had arisen for several reasons=>

1st, Jewish tradition—These were converted Jews, who had been raised in synagogues where any man was allowed to speak who had something he wanted to say.

This custom must have been carried over, when they began to meet as churches of Xn Jews.

This was the “open microphone” approach in which unqualified people made ignorant, senseless, even heretical comments.

2nd, Gk individualism—The same problem was also occurring among Gk-speaking Gentiles, prob. because Greece’s democratic customs encouraged people to state their opinions openly.

E.g. Paul had to regulate the activities in worship services of the Gk church at Corinth, because he said, “*When you assemble, **each one** has a psalm, has a **teaching**, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation*” (I Cor 14:26).

Everybody had something to so.

This had caused such chaos/disorder that Paul set up some rules=>

- * Speakers’ statements had to be intended to edify other Xns, not just express one’s opinions.
- * All things had to be done properly & w/ order.
- * There were to be only 2 or 3 speakers per service.
- * Women were to keep silent in all worship services.

3rd, ego—Within Jewish culture, teachers were highly esteemed.

Egotistical men wanted the prestige of teaching without earning the necessary credibility through study, training, & instruction.

This resulted in unqualified teachers w/i the church.

According to I Tim 1:5-7, this was also happening at Ephesus, because Paul writes=> *“The goal of **our** instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. / For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, / **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.”*

That still happens in churches today.

There are people who want to be teachers simply because the influence/authority of that role gratifies their ego. James said *“Let **not many** become teachers,”* but today we have *“many teachers”* needing to be taught themselves & to at least become teachable.

In the little town of Sedona alone, there are 24 churches.

It's a wonderful thing when a biblically knowledgeable man wants to start a Bible study as part of the church he attends.

If such a man wants people to think of that study as their separate church, & of him as a pastor, his ego may drive him into a role for which he isn't really prepared, & which can damage that church, by splitting it.

I've had occasion to suggest that some such men go to seminary, become qualified to accept the full responsibility of a pastor-teacher, & serve in that role fulltime.

They haven't taken my advice, either because they didn't want to invest that much in ministry;
Or they thought they knew enough already.

When they have declined to do so, they've become exactly the kind of people for whom James' words were intended=> "*Let **not many** of you become **teachers**.*"

This creates a situation that's detrimental, both for those being led by the man, & for the man himself.

- * Their spiritual welfare now depends on instruction from a "pastor" who is prob. unqualified to really teach them the whole purpose/counsel of God.

- * He has taken upon himself the major responsibility for feeding them God's Word, and nurturing their spiritual growth, but he's not prepared to do so, w/ any depth.

He'll have to account to God for his failure, because Heb 13:17 says of all spiritual leaders who take on themselves this responsibility=>

*"They keep watch over your souls, as those who will **give an account**."*

So whether/not they're really prepared to do so, they
will have to give an account.

**The word “teachers” (*didaskaloi*) is a title of honor most often
assigned to Jesus in the NT.**

But it can also refer to anyone who occupies an official teaching
or preaching office among God's people.

* E.g. Jesus referred to Nicodemus as=> “*the didaskalos of
Israel*” (Jn 3:10).

* Nicodemus was also among those to whom Jesus referred
when He said=> “*The scribes and the Pharisees have
seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all
that they tell you, do and observe*” (Mt 23:2-3).

“Moses' chair” was the position of the official Jewish
interpreter/teacher of Scripture.

Jesus told the Jews to do as the scribes/Pharisees
said, because they were teaching the Word, for
better/worse.

Unfortunately, He then added, “*but do not do
according to their deeds; for they say things,
and do not do them.*”

They taught by precept, but not by example.

* Eph 4:11=> “*He [X] gave some [to the Church] as
apostles, and some as prophets, and some as
evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers
[didaskaloi].*”

A pastor has the primary responsibility for
interpreting/preaching Scripture w/i a church.

Q: What about S.S. teachers, Bible study leaders, & counselors?

Are they responsible like pastor-teachers, and will theirs too be a “*stricter judgment*”? To some extent, yes.

God must hold them accountable to at least some degree, if they teach people error, esp. out of carelessness.

Jesus said=> “**Whoever** then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so **teaches** others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but **whoever** keeps and **teaches** them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:19).

This doesn’t mean X wants to restrain His people from teaching.

He just want them to teach accurately, according to His Word & His will, teaching others the truth, & teaching them to obey God.

II Tim 2:15 must apply to lay-teachers a/w/a pastors, because both teach God’s Word=> “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **handling accurately the word of truth.***”

Paul is writing to Timothy, a pastor.

But the word “*workman*” is broad enough to apply this principle to any Xn teacher.

But when lay-teachers are simply repeating what their pastor has taught them, the main burden of responsibility has to fall/rest on him, not them.

I believe Lk 12:48 would apply here=> *“From everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”*

Pastor’s have been entrusted with and received much, & a S.S. teacher would come under the umbrella of that pastor’s responsibility.

Now we come to words that have always disturbed me, and should disturb every pastor/preacher/teacher=>

*“...as such we shall incur a **stricter** [greater] **judgment**.”*

That standard is higher for those who teach, than it is for others.

I feel keenly the necessity of handling accurately the Word of truth, so I won’t be condemned under that stricter judgment that must be mine as a teacher, when I stand before the Lord.

For that reason I study/pray for hours, over every sermon I preach, knowing I’m incurring a *“stricter judgment”*;

And I don’t want to be ashamed.

I don’t claim to be very good at it.

But I certainly want to be faithful about it.

I don’t know how other pastors/preachers may deal with James’ words here, but they will always dominate my approach to the ministry, regardless of who thinks I’m fanatical about it, or who takes offense at some particular biblical truth I

teach, after carefully/diligently trying to interpret a text of Scripture.

As long as I am still qualified to teach/preach, I will pour my self into it, even if that makes me seem boring, simple-minded, or a one-dimensional egghead.

The word “*judgment*” points to the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ.

That’s where whatever a man builds on the foundation of Jesus X will be tested/revealed by fire, & if any man’s work remains, he will be rewarded.

Some people might feel that a church like ours thinks it’s always right.

Or that it thinks every other church is always wrong.

We don’t believe those things, but we are committed to what we do believe is the biblical pattern of ministry, so that we will receive a fully reward, regardless of what other churches do/don’t-do.

If others want to risk X’s stricter judgment by doing other things instead of carefully/faithfully/accurately sowing God’s Word into His people’s hearts, that’s up to them—but we won’t.

Again, I’m not saying that we do everything well, or even right.

But we do know what our priorities are to be, and we try to conduct our ministry in accordance w/ those priorities.

James' words imply that many became teachers who shouldn't have, being fully aware that they'd incur stricter judgment, but heedless/indifferent to James' warning.

That is foolhardy arrogance & should alert Xns to the danger of failure in the teaching-duties they have rashly taken upon themselves.

Those who speak for God are to do so, knowing full well they will be held strictly-accountable for what their words and their effect on other people's hearts/lives.

When the 16th cent. Scottish Reformer, John Knox, went into the pulpit to preach for the first time, the weight of that responsibility caused him to weep so profusely that others had to take him down from there.

Preachers/teachers should prepare carefully, because laziness, inadequate study, or reckless/inaccurate handling of God's Word, will cost them their reward, and leave them open to serious criticism/judgment.

God has given them special privileges, & they should take those privileges seriously, heeding God's warning to the OT prophet Ezekiel—*“Son of man, I have appointed you a **watchman** to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, **warn** them from Me. / When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die'; and you do **not warn** him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall **die** in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at **your** hand. / Yet if you **have***

*warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, **he** shall die in his iniquity; but **you** have **delivered yourself***” (Ezek 3:17-19).

Because the religious leaders of Judah didn’t take such warnings seriously, but amused themselves, fed their egos, and lined their own pockets instead of feeding God’s people His Word, He ultimately said in Ezek 34=>

*“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, **I am against the shepherds**, and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep’” (34:10).*

Short of that kind of sobering divine opposition to spiritually malfeasant shepherds (who are indifferent to the flock that God entrusts to them), every teacher should keep in mind the truth, that his eternal rewards depend on his faithfulness in teaching.

It is required of God’s stewards that one be found faithful to obey his Master (I Cor 4:2).

The measure of our failure to do so, is the measure of our culpability in the strict judgment that faces/awaits us.

So we who teach should make it our goal to say w/ Paul=>

*“I did not shrink from declaring to you the **whole** purpose of God” (Acts 20:27).*

This brings us to the other side of the teacher’s conundrum.

*** Teachers Themselves Stumble Like Others**

[Verse 2]=> *“For we all stumble in many ways....”*

James says “we all stumble”—including himself.

Stumbling into sin is the moral norm for man, including Xns.

II Chron 6=> “*There is **no** man who does **not** sin*” (6:36).

Not only are we prone to stumble, we do it in many
different ways.

Although true Xns don’t fall from grace, we do stumble & suffer
moral lapses.

Then we confess our sin, straighten up & go forward again.

But just as in literal/physical stumbling, our missteps are
embarrassing/painful/serious.

[Verse 2b]=> “*If anyone does not stumble in what he **says**, he is
a **perfect** man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*”

**An ability to control the tongue is proof of self-control, and
thus of spiritual maturity.**

That’s because the tongue is the hardest member of our body to
control—like a wild stallion that hates to be bridled.

We gain some perspective on the tongue’s unruly proneness to
sin, as we recall 2 surreal scenes in Scripture.

One is found in the OT, the other in the NT.

One takes place in heaven, the other in hell=>

* When the angel took the coal off the altar to purge Isaiah’s sin,
it was to Isaiah’s mouth that he applied that hot coal.

Why? Because Isaiah said, “*I am a man of unclean lips.*”

Mt 15:18=> “*The things that proceed out of the mouth
come from the heart.*”

Man’s wickedness/depravity finds its outlet from his
mouth.

* In Lk 16:24, the rich man in hell complained of its fire.

He asked that Lazarus “*dip the tip of his finger in water & cool off my **tongue**; for I am in agony in this flame.*”

It was the rich man’s tongue (the worst-offending member) that felt the heat of the fire.

Any believer who can control his tongue so that it doesn’t cause him to stumble into sin, is a “*perfect*” man.

The word “*perfect*” doesn’t mean he is sinless.

It simply means he is spiritually mature—self-controlled.

He has learned to keep a tight rein on that wild-stallion=> his tongue.

He’s no longer a babe in X, but has developed a depth of knowledge, a ripeness of temperament/self-controlled character, that has made him a grown-up Xn.

Because the mature Xn has reined-in his hard-to-control tongue, he has also gained some control over every less difficult part of his body, & its proneness to sin.

Again—not flawlessly (that’s not what “*perfect*” means), but the overall pattern of his life has become one of self-control.

You see it in both his words/actions.

He has become like Paul, who said=> “*I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (I Cor 9:27).

A “*perfect*” man is trying to emulate his Savior’s control of His tongue, as closely as possible.

We see a prime example of X’s perfect self-control in I Pet 2=>

*“Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, / WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY **DECEIT** FOUND IN HIS **MOUTH**; / and while being **reviled**, He did not **revile** in return; while suffering, He **uttered** no **threats**, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (I Pet 2:21-23).*

He from whose mouth will someday come a sharp sword
when He returns, could have uttered some
sharp/terrible threats.

But He didn't, because He perfectly controlled His tongue.
A mature Xn is following His Lord's example closer/closer, as he
yields himself daily to the H.S. w/i him.

Stumbling is no longer the ongoing pattern of his life, as it
was while he was still a spiritual toddler.

But even when he was a child of the faith, he longed for the
pure milk of the Word like a newborn babe, & thru it
he grew, in respect to salvation (I Pet 2:2).

Now he has outgrown some of his old childish ways.

His thinking is no longer child-like, but mature (I C 14:20).

His-speech/his-teaching have become God-honoring, as the
Spirit has brought his unbridled heart under control.

And more/more it's matched up with a God-honoring
life.

He says w/ David (Psa 39:1)—*“I will guard my ways, That
I may not sin w/ my **tongue**.”*

And like David, he knows he must have the Lord's help to
guard his mouth, so he prays=> *“Set a guard, O*

LORD, over my mouth” (Psa 141:3).

Someone: Why would *anyone* ever want to be a teacher, since the Bible says not to become many teachers, and warns that theirs is the stricter judgment?

Reason #1—because God’s people need teachers (just not
unqualified teachers)

In Hosea 4, God says=> *“There is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. / There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed” (4:1-2).*

Then God addresses the priests—the teachers—blaming them for this tragedy=> *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you [priests and teachers] have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”*

The threat that God would forget our children is too grievous for us to let it happen, w/o our becoming faithful teachers to forestall that.

If you love the Lord, love God’s people, & want them to enjoy the full benefits of knowing Him, by coming to know about Him, you teach them, & you do the best job of it you can. You don’t do a sloppy job, nor go into it lightly, knowing that teachers will be subjected to a stricter judgment.

But instead of letting that scare you off, you
determine to use it, to keep yourself faithfully
on target.

And you make sure you're not going into it for personal
“glory.”

You do it, and you try to do it well, because the price God's
people must pay for ignorance, is far too high, so you
must step-in, making yourself available to teach.

Why should a Xn parent become a teacher to his children?

Because he loves them, & they need his mature instruction.

So he has no option but to take God at His Word=> “***Train***
up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is
old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

Reason #2—because God expects mature Xns to teach.

In Heb 5, the author of Hebrews rebuked the Xns to whom he

was writing, saying=> “*Though by this time you **ought to***
***be teachers**, you have need again for someone to teach you*
the elementary principles of the oracles of God”
(Heb 5:12).

There comes a time in the maturing process of every Xn, when he

“***ought to be a teacher***”—he's under obligation to do so.

Not to do so, would be selfishly hanging-on to his
old/willful immaturity.

He's supposed to follow Jesus, who spent His whole life
teaching & spreading the light of truth to people lost
in darkness.

Just before His death, He told those in the Upper Room to:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, / **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).*

They started the process, but now they’re gone, so it’s our turn to take up where they left off.

If we don’t do it, who will?

Reason #3—because the personal rewards are so great both now and in eternity)

It is a wonderful joy for teachers to see someone they’ve taught growing-up/serving the Lord, excited about their faith in X.

The Apostle John felt that way, & so he wrote=> *“I have no*

*greater **joy** than this, to hear of my children [in the faith, whom I taught] walking in the truth” (3 Jn 1:4).*

The Apostle Paul referred to the people he had taught as=>

“my joy and crown,” calling them beloved brethren whom he longed to see (Phil 4:10).

Love like that is reward enough to offset the risk of stricter judgment.

It comes from investing one’s life in others, as their teacher.

Paul instructed Timothy to, *“continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, **knowing from whom** you have learned them” (2 Tim 3:14).*

He learned them from Eunice/Lois
(mother/grandmother).

Just imagine the pride they must have felt over him,
teaching others what they had taught him.

The other personal reward for teaching is found in the fact that it
spurs on a teacher himself, to greater growth.

The best way to really learn something, is to teach it, to
someone.

Knowing he must teach by example a/w/a word, a teacher
will rein in his own tongue/life, & as a result he will
be far more diligent to apply God's Word to himself.

It's all just part of God's marvelous plan for growing us up,
from spiritual childhood, to adulthood, to parenthood,
& the honorable role of a teacher.

“The Teacher’s Conundrum”

July 15, 2012

Text: James 3:1-2

1. The conundrum faced by every Christian teacher has to do with the standoff between God’s high standards for teachers... and their own human tendency to [16 stumble] into sin, especially sins of speech.
Jms 3:10; II Cor 4:6-7
2. We preachers and teachers have been entrusted with the treasure of the light of the knowledge of God’s glory, but we carry it around in common old faulty clay pots—[22 ourselves].

Today’s text presents the two sides of the teacher’s conundrum...

*** Teachers are Judged More Strictly**

[James 3:1]

I Cor 14:26

3. There are people who want to be teachers simply because the influence and authority of that role gratifies their [10 ego].
Heb 13:17
4. “Teachers” is a title of honor; it can refer to anyone who occupies an official teaching or preaching [14 office] among God’s people.
Jn 3:10; Mt 23:2-3; Eph 4:11
5. What about Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and counselors? God must hold them accountable if they teach people [12 error] especially out of carelessness.

6. But when they are simply repeating what their pastor has taught them, the main [14 burden] of responsibility has to rest on him.

Lk 12:48

7. James' words imply that many became teachers who shouldn't have being fully aware that they would incur stricter judgment; that is foolhardy [22 arrogance].

[Ezek 3:17-19; 34:10]

8. Every teacher should keep in mind the truth that his eternal [16 rewards] depend on his faithfulness in teaching.

I Cor 4:2; Acts 20:27

[Verse 2a]

II Chron 6:36

[Verse 2b]

9. An ability to control the tongue is proof of self-control and thus of [22 spiritual] maturity.

Lk 16:24

10. Because the mature Christian has reined in his hard-to-control tongue, he has also gained some control over every less difficult part of his body and its proneness to [8 sin].

I Cor 9:27; I Pet 2:21-23; 2:2; I Cor 14:20; Psa 141:3

Why would *anyone* ever want to be a teacher since theirs is the stricter judgment?

- *11. Reason #1—because God's people [10 need] teachers.

Hosea 4:1-2, 6; Prov 22:6

- *12. Reason #2—because God [16 expects] mature Christians to teach.

Heb 5:12; Mt 28:19-20

- *13. Reason #3—because the personal [16 rewards] are so great.

III Jn 1:4; Phil 4:10; II Tim 3:14

14. Knowing he must teach by example as well as word, a teacher will be far more diligent to [12 apply] God's Word to himself.