

James 3:1 - Stricter Judgement for Those Who Teach the Bible

This week we will look at James 3:1, where James warns that God will judge bible teachers in churches with a higher standard.

Memory Verses

James 1:2-4 NKJV

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Revision

Last week we covered James 2:14-26 where we learnt about two kinds of works and two kinds of faith. Firstly, there is faith without works. This is a dead kind of faith, a faith that cannot save, a dead faith that produces dead works. The writer of Hebrews defines dead works as legalism or religion — trying to live a life that pleases God by depending or relying on our own strength.

Secondly, there is living faith, or saving faith, which produces living works which are the fruit of a changed, regenerated or transformed heart. Good works are the inevitable result of belief in the gospel and genuine repentance or making up your mind to turn from sin and follow God. Remember:

***It is not faith or works
It is not faith and works
It is faith that works.'***

This week we continue our journey through the book of James in Chapter 3:1-2 where James warns us that there will be greater accountability or stricter judgement for those who take up the role of teaching the bible in a public setting. It's really important that a person both be anointed or gifted by the Holy Spirit, and, appointed by man who has the responsibility to observe the person and see if they are also demonstrating the character traits of a deacon or elder as outlined in Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy.

Stricter Judgement for Those Who Teach the Bible

James 3:1-2 NKJV

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

v 1 **Let not many of you become teachers:** Why not? Because **we shall receive a stricter judgment.** Those who want to become teachers in the church need to realise that God will hold us accountable to a higher standard. However, we can apply this to all believers to some degree, as all believers are tasked with preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). This is God's mandate for all

believers. It may not be a public ministry as such, but when we share the gospel with our friends and family, we need to know what we are talking about and be willing to share the gospel. The level of accountability may not be as high as a pastor, bible study leader, or Sunday School teacher, but all believers will be accountable to some degree when we stand before Jesus at the Bema seat. A part of our reward will be Christ determining if we have been faithful to obey His command, His mandate, the great commission, to go and make disciples of all nations.

The concept of those with greater authority or knowledge being held to a higher standard is also, or should also be, true in the world as well. In the world, those with greater authority also get the big money. Why is this? Because they also have greater weight of increased accountability and responsibility resting on their shoulders. While we don't (or shouldn't) do it for reward down here, we are aware that there will be reward up there in heaven. Jesus explains the link between authority, responsibility, and reward in:

Luke 12:42-48 NLT

And the Lord replied, "A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master **can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them.**

⁴³ If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. ⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.

⁴⁵ But what if the servant thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? ⁴⁶ The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant in pieces and banish him with the unfaithful.

⁴⁷ **"And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn't prepared and doesn't carry out those instructions, will be severely punished.** ⁴⁸ But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. **When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.**

I think that there are many today who take the position of teacher lightly in the church, without considering its cost in terms of accountability and responsibility — not just what we teach, but also in how we live — both are important. The cost is the greater care or due diligence that must be taken, because any negligence in either will result in many of God's people being hurt or misled, or people being turned away from God. James is saying that any failure to accurately represent God through both our teaching the whole counsel of God and the way we live will result in a stricter judgement. Why? A person in authority in a church has a great influence over those he teaches, which can be used for good or evil. People can be turned to God or away from God. Remember that: "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required" Luke 12:48.

Moffatt comments: "James found that this department of church-work had become extremely popular. Hence his warning about its serious responsibilities. God will judge us on the last day with special strictness on account of our influence over others."

v 1 **Knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement:** When will we be judged? At the Bema Seat Judgement. This judgement of rewards is for believers only. Jesus will come again to receive His church to Himself, and then He will reward us. It is described in:

1 Corinthians 3:9-15 NKJV

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

These verses give us a good clue as to just what standard bible teachers will be judged by — is their teaching of the word of God, and especially the gospel, in accordance or agreement with the Word of God. Are they God's words or man's words?

In Acts 20:6, Paul is at the end of his life. He describes his ministry and tells those who are listening that he is innocent of the blood of all men. What does Paul mean? Through the bible there is a common theme that those who are entrusted with representing God to the people have a higher accountability because of the eternal ramifications involved. This is laid out clearly in:

Ezekiel 3:17-19 NLT

"Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for Israel. Whenever you receive a message from me, warn people immediately. ¹⁸ If I warn the wicked, saying, 'You are under the penalty of death,' but you fail to deliver the warning, they will die in their sins. And I will hold you responsible for their deaths. ¹⁹ If you warn them and they refuse to repent and keep on sinning, they will die in their sins. But you will have saved yourself because you obeyed me."

Paul is also a great example of a man who lived his life with the end in view — the judgement seat of Christ. He was running the race to win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, Philippians 3:14), he was running to win. Also notice here that it's not just what Paul taught (the whole counsel of God) that mattered, but also the way he lived.

Acts 20:24-35 NKJV

²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

³² “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵ I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

In the movie *A Thief in the Night* - there was a pastor didn’t teach the true gospel, allegorised prophecy, didn’t teach the soon return of our Lord at the rapture, and didn’t hold to the verbal or full inspiration/inerrancy of the scriptures. As a result, many of his congregation were not saved and went into the tribulation. He was contrasted with another pastor who did teach the whole counsel of God, who taught a Christ centred gospel, and did teach prophecy correctly, encouraging people to live pure lives because Jesus could come back at any time.

Unfortunately, in many of today’s church, this is not fiction, and there are many who have been led astray by either pastors who teach a works gospel, or the prosperity gospel. As we read previously, many will confess “Lord, Lord”, but will not be welcomed by Jesus. Many of the people in these churches will either miss the rapture and find themselves in the tribulation, or worse still, die and face an unwelcoming Jesus when they stand before Him.

Here is a quote from Ray Comfort in the evidence bible that illustrates how serious this is. It is called:

“A Dream of Judgment Day

This passage (Dan 7:9-10) refers to the great and terrible day of the Lord. (See also 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 1:13-18; 20:11-15.) This should ever be in the mind of the Christian. This is why we preach Christ—not to improve the lifestyle of the unsaved, and not to "change" their lives. We preach Christ so that sinners may be saved from the wrath that is to come.

May the following letter, written by a pastor, stir your heart to do all that you can to lead sinners to genuine conversion:

Dear Brother Ray,

I have been a pastor for 25 years. I always thought I was doing a reasonably good job. Kind of like the folks who consider themselves "good people." I had tried to preach, what I thought, was the whole counsel of God. I prayed, over the years, with many people to accept Jesus and make Him Lord of their lives.

My wife, Judy, and I moved to Ruidoso, New Mexico, about six years ago to plant a church. Shortly after arriving I was convicted that something was horribly wrong with my ministry. I read the Scriptures and prayed earnestly that God would show me what was wrong. The feeling continued to grow and I became depressed and moody. I asked Judy to pray for me and explained my problem. I didn't know if this was the Holy Spirit convicting or Satan attacking. She prayed that God would reveal the cause of my depression and make Himself clear as He revealed any problem with my ministry for Him.

That night I had the most terrifying, realistic, blood-chilling nightmare any man has ever had. I am a Vietnam veteran and I know a little about nightmares. Nothing in my experience has ever come close, nor do I ever want it to, to the horror of that night.

I dreamed that it was Judgment Day and I was standing right next to the throne of God. I noticed that to my left and my right were pastors as far as I could see. I thought this was odd that the Lord would reserve this front-row space for pastors only.

I looked out across a space of only a few yards and there were millions, maybe billions, of people, yet I could see each one of their eyes staring at me. As I studied this group I noticed that I knew many of them from times at the altar or ones who had sat under my teaching. I was pleased to see that they had made it to heaven, but confused because they didn't look happy. They looked very angry and hateful.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord say, "Away, I never knew you." I was suddenly frightened that what I was seeing were those who thought they were saved. Then I saw all of them pointing a finger at each of us pastors and saying together, in one voice that shook my soul, "We sat in your church and thought we were saved. Why didn't you tell us we were lost?"

Tears were pouring down my face and the faces of all of those pastors. I watched as one by one those people were cast into hell. One and then another, and another, and another..., until they were all gone. I died inside as each one screamed in agony and gnashed their teeth, cursing us as they went into the lake of fire.

Then I was looking into the face of Jesus and He said to me, "Is this the part where I'm supposed to say, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant'?" I woke up with a scream and my heart pounding and I was begging Jesus to forgive me.

I died a million deaths that night. Since that night I have done two things on a daily basis. I do everything I can to preach the Law before grace in the hope that conviction of sin will bring a sinner to true salvation. The other thing that I do is pray for every person I have ever preached to, asking God to repair any damage I have done. I also never believe anyone when they tell me they are saved. It is my duty to challenge them and search out the solidness of their salvation.

I am learning to be more effective and confident as I teach others how to share their faith by using the Law. I have seen several people saved, who thought they were saved, as I have used the "Way of the Master" material to teach them evangelism.

I do want to hear those words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," and thanks to you and your team I have a better chance of hearing them. Thank you! I just wanted to let you know, some pastors are waking up to the truth. The desire of my heart is to please God. I pray that my days of being a man-pleaser are over along with the nightmares. I also pray that God will use me to bring other pastors into the truth of the Gospel message so that they will not have to face the nightmare that I did.

Steve Kreins"

Now you may be thinking that this is just too hard — God is expecting too much from me. I can't do it. What if I make a mistake and say the wrong thing? But listen to these both sobering and comforting verses from Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:12-16 NLT

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. *(If we stop here it all seems pretty harsh)*

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Yes, it is true that we will have to give an account for everything that we do, say, and think, including every secret motive is known by God. But this is not meant to drive us to despair. Rather, our realisation of our complete inability to live a life that pleases God should drive us to the throne of God where we will find all the grace, forgiveness, and help we need. Jesus our High Priest both knows our weaknesses, and is interceding for us. What is He praying for us? Here is an example.

Luke 22:32 NLT

But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.”

I’m not here to beat up the sheep, I’m here to feed and encourage you. I’m not here to give you a guilt trip, or leave you feeling burdened or feeling like a failure and that you just want to quit because of all the times that we have all failed. I’m not here to only tell you, “Hey brother or sister, you better not mess up because Jesus will hold you to account. You’d better not fail Him or you will be ashamed.” Yes I have to be honest with you about how we will be judged at the Bema seat reward judgement, but that is not the whole picture. Don’t lose sight of the fact that our God is a gentle God who walks with us, knows our weaknesses, understands that we are dust, and is praying effectively for us.

Consider that our Lord didn’t stop loving Peter and He didn’t give up on Peter, even though He knew that Peter would deny Him. Instead, in an incredible act of mercy and love, Jesus let Peter know that although he would deny Him, He wasn’t finished with Peter. All Peter had to do was repent of his sin and then he would be used by God yet again.

Jesus had a plan and a purpose for Peter’s life, and God’s grace was greater than Peter’s sin. “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20). I find it incredible that Jesus would use Peter to be the main spokesman to share the good news of the gospel on the day of Pentecost, when only days before, Peter had denied Him three times. But this is the nature of our God — He is so gracious. One of my favourite Psalms is Psalm 103. Here is a part of it.

Psalm 103:8-14 NLT

The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

⁹ He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.

¹⁰ He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.

¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

¹² He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west.

¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows how weak we are;
he remembers we are only dust.

Again, don't let satan condemn you. Don't let satan use your failings to drive you to despair. Instead, like Peter, we let our failings remind us that we are weak, and then we run back to our loving Heavenly Father who will run toward us to welcome us back, strengthen us, equip us, empower us, and encourage us. Again:

Hebrews 4:16 NKJV

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Remember that the Christian walk is not about trying harder, but simply learning to rest in the Lord.

Hebrews 4:10 NLT

For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labours, just as God did after creating the world.

We only have two choices; get things done by our own strength, or by God's strength. Peter thought that he could get things done by his own strength — "Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you" (Luke 22:33). Jesus patiently waited for Peter to fail as he trusted in himself, learned the lesson that he is weak, repented of his lack of submission to God, and then be used again — but this time Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, Peter had entered into God's rest, meaning that he was relying on God's power and not his own.

Also consider that God never leaves us with a job unless He first gives us the resources to accomplish it.

2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. **These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.**

What this means is that anything God can do, I can do (according to His will), because God is living in me. Paul had the same experience as Peter. He had to learn to stop relying on his own strength to try to live a life that pleased God. He came to understand, that by his own strength, he could simply never be good enough to live a life that pleased God. But then he learned the secret of living by faith, living by trusting in God and not ourselves.

Galatians 2:19-20 NLT

For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. ²⁰ My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Galatians 2:20, like 1 Peter 1:3-4, is one of my favourite verses. It holds the key to the successful Christian walk. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Paul also said in:

Philippians 4:13 NKJV

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

What did Jesus say about trying to live the christian life?

John 15:5 NKJV

“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; **for without Me you can do nothing.**”

What I want you to see is that when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ, what we are really being judged or rewarded for is not what we did on our own strength, but rather through the power of God living in us and working through us. It's not a matter of us trying to be good enough, but rather that we are willing to submit to God's will for our lives. It's all about submission. If we are submitted to Christ, then He will have His way in us, His will will be done through us, and then He rewards *us* for the good things that *He* did. What an awesome deal. I get rewarded for the things that God did through me, using the gifts and talents that He gave me, all done by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in me. All I have to do is stop trying to do things by myself, stop living independently of God, and instead learn to trust in and depend on God, living a life obedient to the word of God and the day by day leading of the Holy Spirit.