

LESSON FOUR

What Are the Qualities of a Good Teacher, continued

1. A proper attitude toward the preparation of the lesson. It is a privilege, not a problem; it is a blessing, not a burden; it is an opportunity, not an oppression.
2. A proper attitude toward the presentation of the lesson. What is it that makes you want to hear a teacher teach? Most people who answer that question would at least include passion or enthusiasm as an important trait of an effective teacher. Who wants to hear someone speak or teach who is dry, dull, or detached from what it is that the teacher is attempting to teach? Where does passion for teaching come from? It comes from spending time with God. The best teaching comes from overflow.
3. A proper attitude toward the church. Each teacher, in accepting a teaching assignment, is expected to demonstrate an attitude of “seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” by faithfully attending all services of the church and by living a Godly life. All personal habits of an objectionable nature should be scrupulously avoided. While this is expected of every Christian, it is expected to the highest degree in the life of one who publicly teaches the Word of God.
4. A proper attitude toward the class. The teacher is not teaching for himself, even though if proper preparation is made he will inevitably learn more than the class. The teacher is teaching for the class. Every lesson should be prepared with the class in mind. What is there in this study that will speak to the problems, concerns, needs and hope of the hearers? What can I say from this text that will draw the hearers closer to God? What is there that will cause them to want to study more and learn more about Christ? How can I encourage them to bring others to class that will enable us to be more evangelistic?

These qualities are requirements, not electives. While perfection is not required, continuing progress is. Phil. 3:14 applies to the teacher in a special sense: “I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The teacher who is not getting better is by definition getting worse. Getting neither better nor worse is not an alternative because standing still prevents one from getting closer to the goal, resulting in falling behind from where one should be.

“Be Not Many of You Teachers”

Why does the Bible say, “Be not many of you teachers” (James 3:1)? Most of us are familiar with this passage, but few of us have taken the time to really think about it. It is strange that that should be the case in a class of those who are or who would be teachers. Have we not been taught all of our lives to look for, listen to, and heed warnings? This statement is a warning. It is not intended to discourage and hinder. It is similar to a “winding road” sign. It is there to tell us that the road ahead requires special attention and care, and that failure to conduct ourselves accordingly can result in fatal consequences for ourselves and others.

This is one of the most extensive confrontations in James’ entire letter. He was addressing his “brothers” in the faith and offered one of the most note-worthy bits of advice in the entire New Testament. He admonished them to limit the number of teachers in their midst. Self-limitations should be established. To be a teacher within the church is something for which one is recognized; it requires mastering the Scriptures and their application to faith and life.

The wording is exact; μή does not precede the verb but precedes πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι and thus shows that while some must of necessity assume the responsibility, many others should not do so. Not many should be teachers and even fewer should fill the pulpit.

The warning is parallel to that of our Lord in Matt. 23:8, *seq.*, “Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Teacher [διδάσκαλος, and not, as Textus Receptus, καθηγητής], and all ye are brethren.” The readiness of the Jews to

take upon themselves the office of teachers¹ and to set up as “guides of the blind, teachers of bribes,’ etc., is alluded to by Paul in Rom. 2:17-24, and such a passage as 1 Cor. 14:26 ff. denotes not merely the presence of a similar tendency among Christians, but also the opportunity given for its exercise in the Church.”²

“James makes the reason for the warning clear. **Knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment** (ληψόμεθα). By the use of the first person, James includes himself, thus giving a remarkable proof of humility. (The Vulgate, missing this, has wrongly *sumitis*.) Comp. vv. 2, 9, where also he uses the first person, with great delicacy of feeling not separating himself from those whose conduct he denounces. Μείζον κρίμα. The form of expression recalls our Lord’s saying of the Pharisees, “These shall receive greater condemnation (περισσότερον κρίμα)” (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).³

The evil referred to is that where *many* desired to be teachers, *few* could be qualified for the office, and comparatively few were required. A small number, well qualified, would better discharge the duties of the office, and do more good, than many would; and there would be great evil in having many crowding themselves unqualified into the office. The word here

¹ “However, even the Jews had warnings about the dangers teachers faced: the teachers, Rabbis; see above, 1:4. To expound Torah wrongly is to promote the transgression of its precepts. If, as the divine retribution for doing so, a teacher is exiled to a place of **evil waters**, i.e. a place where there is no sound teaching of Torah, he may perpetuate his error, so that those who **come after**, i.e. learn from him, may **drink**, i.e. receive his teaching, and **die**, i.e. fall into sin for which death is the divine punishment. In that case, it will **be found**, i.e. it will result, that the name of God has been **profaned**.”

Commentary on the Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Pirke Aboth 1.11 (“Sayings of the Jewish Fathers”).

² *The Pulpit Commentary: James*. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (42). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ *The Pulpit Commentary: James*. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (42). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

rendered *masters* (διδάσκαλοι) should have been rendered *teachers*. It is so rendered in John 3:2; Acts 13:1; Rom. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:11; 4:3; Heb. 5:12; though it is elsewhere frequently rendered *master*. It has, however, in it primarily the notion of *teaching* (διδάσκω), even when rendered *master*; and the word *master* is often used in the New Testament, as it is with us, to denote an *instructor*—as the ‘school-master.’ Comp. Matt. 10:24, 25; 22:16; Mark 10:17; 12:19, *et al.* The word is not properly used in the sense of *master*, as distinguished from *a servant*, but as distinguished from *a disciple* or *learner*. Such a position, indeed, implies *authority*, but it is authority based not on power, but on superior qualifications. The connection implies that the word is used in that sense in this place; and the evil reprehended is that of seeking the office of public instructor, especially the sacred office. It would seem that this was a prevailing fault among those to whom James wrote. This desire was common among the Jewish people, who coveted the name and the office of *Rabbi*, equivalent to that here used, (comp. Matt. 23:7), and who were ambitious to be doctors and teachers. See Rom. 2:19; 1 Tim. 1:7. This fondness for the office of teachers they naturally carried with them into the Christian church when they were converted, and it is this that James here rebukes. ‘The same spirit the passage before us would also rebuke now, and for the same reasons; for although a man should be willing to become a public instructor of the Scripture, and should esteem it a privilege when the opportunity arises, yet there would be scarcely any thing more injurious to the cause of Christ, or that would tend more to produce disorder and confusion, than one’s seeking the prominence and importance that one has by virtue of being a public instructor while being unqualified to be and unwilling to study to become qualified to be a teacher of the Word. If there is any thing that ought to be

managed with extreme prudence and caution, it is introducing one into the service of public teaching. Comp. 1 Tim. 5:22.

Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation, (μῆϊζον κριμα). Or rather, *a severer judgment*; that is, we shall have a severer trial, and give a stricter account. The word here used does not necessarily mean *condemnation*, but *judgment, trial, account*; and the consideration which the apostle suggests is not that those who were public teachers would be *condemned*, but that there would be a much more solemn account to be rendered by them than by others, and that they ought duly to reflect on that in seeking the position of teaching. James would carry them in anticipation before the judgment-seat, and have them determine the question of becoming a teacher there. No better ‘stand-point’ can be taken in making up the mind in regard to this work; and if that had been the position assumed in order to estimate the work, and to make up the mind in regard to the choice of this service, many a one who has sought the office would have been deterred from it; and it may be added, also, that many a pious and Bible-educated youth *would* have sought the office. One who is about to make a choice of becoming a teacher, should go by anticipation to the judgment-bar of Christ, and ask, “Am I willing to work and sacrifice in order to reach that goal?” If *that* were the point of view taken, how many would have been deterred from teaching who have sought it with a view to the honor and praise they could receive! How many, too, who would have devoted themselves to teaching of the Word, had they determined whether their duty was to serve God as a messenger of the cross?