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A0733 – August 19, 2006 – Jas 3:1-3 – Do Not Many Become Teachers

As we enter chapter 3 we're going to shift to the second major section in the body of James' letter. As we do this we want to review two contexts. The study of various contexts is essential to the first step in Bible study. We call that "observation". This is where we play Sherlock Holmes with the text and the question here is "What do I see?" There are four facets to observation and one of those is context. This morning I want to review two basic contexts. First, the historical context. Books of the Bible were not written in a vacuum but in response to some historical event(s). What was the situation? Who was involved? Who were these people? Why did James write to them? James wrote to the earliest Christians, they were Jews who lived in the Jerusalem area and had believed in the Messiahship of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) or sometime shortly thereafter. As the number of these Jewish Christians began to grow they were met by opposition from the Jewish leadership. They warned the Christians not to speak in Jesus' name. They even arrested them for doing so. Finally the persecution came to a head when a spirit-filled believer named Stephen condemned the Jewish leadership and was pushed off the walls of Jerusalem and stoned to death. The guy who was behind this kind of persecution was Saul, who later became the greatest missionary-theologian we know as Paul. Well, the murder of Stephen sent the Jewish Christians fleeing the land of Israel. That's the situation and it's a very frustrating and stressful situation. These guys needed some tips on how to operate by faith in the Gentile world during stressful circumstances. So, James writes to give them the help they need. He assumes they were aware of other OT saints such as Abraham, Rahab and Job who also went through stressful situations and uses them as a model of how to respond to trials. So, that sets the historical context. Second, the literary context. And why is it important to understand the literary structure of a book? Because there's an

underlying level of meaning communicated by the structure. And that means if we miss the structure then when we get to those difficult verses we're going to set ourselves up to misinterpret them. Books of the Bible were written in terms of a specific literary type and structure. Part of the underlying meaning of the book is communicated by this structure. What we found in our literary study was that James is following a common rhetorical structure followed by 1st century Greek rhetoricians. This structure has three basic parts:

- I. Prologue
- II. Body
- III. Epilogue

James follows this structure.

- I. Prologue (1:1-20)
- II. Body (1:21-5:6)
- III. Epilogue (5:7-20)

In this basic structure the author will bring in a thematic statement near the end of the prologue. So, when we turn to the end of the prologue what do we find is James' thematic statement? James 1:19-20 "*This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Are these three responses optional? Not if we want to produce the righteousness of God. As in every situation there are two basic responses, the fleshly response and the Spirit-filled response, negative volition and positive volition, HVP and DVP. And here we have the three Spirit-filled responses, what I call DVP responses. Their opposites are the fleshly response or HVP and that's what comes naturally. So, here they are imperatives, three imperatives or commands to follow and in the literary structure they give the three-fold outline of the Body of the letter.

- I. Prologue (1:1-20)
- II. Body (1:21-5:6)
 - A. Be Quick to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - B. Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - C. Be Slow to Anger (4:1-5:6)

III. Epilogue (5:7-20)

When we get in a jam these are the three basic responses. They don't come naturally so they must be cultivated. So, James takes the first theme, "Be Quick to Hear" and elaborates on that in 1:21-2:26. We've just finished that theme. Now we move to the second, "Be Slow to Speak" in 3:1-18. This is the other side of the coin. Not only do our ears need to perk up but our tongue needs pipe down; ears must remain open and mouth must remain closed. To cultivate a still tongue James uses two techniques in this section. First, to warn of the dangers of the tongue (3:1-12). Second, to exalt the quiet skillful life (3:13-18).

In dealing with the tongue James draws eight illustrations from experience or nature in the Land of Israel which his audience, Jewish believers of the *Diaspora*, would be familiar with. The tongue has similarities with experience and nature as well as differences. It is similar to many things in that it is very small yet it has great effects, like the rudder of a ship. It is different from many things in that it utters both good and bad, unlike a fresh spring that only provides fresh water. So, the tongue compares and contrasts with many things in our experience and these illustrations should serve as daily reminders of the tongue and its great capacity to either bless or curse. The tongue, of course, was given to humans for the purpose of communicating in propositional language to God and men. The goal of the tongue is to glorify God in all that is said. The problem, of course, is that man fell and now we have a sinful nature. As people regenerated by the will of God at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone we are now spiritually alive and can live according to either the flesh or the Spirit. To glorify God by the tongue we must live by the Spirit. James has already introduced the tongue in 1:26 when he said, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless." In other words, if a person thinks they are applying Bible doctrine but he can't control his tongue he's deceived himself. So, the tongue actually becomes the measure of maturity.

James 3:1-2 ¹Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί μου, εἰδότες ὅτι μείζον κρῖμα ληψόμεθα. ²Πολλὰ γὰρ πταίμεν ἅπαντες. Εἴ τις ἐν λόγῳ οὐ πταίει, οὗτος τέλειος ἀνὴρ, δυνατὸς χαλιναγωγῆσαι καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα.
(BYZ)

James 3:1-2 ¹Do not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble much. If a man does not stumble in his speech, he's a mature man, able to bridle the whole body as well. (**Author's Translation**)

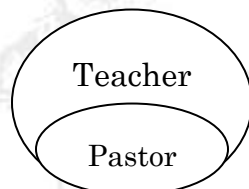
James 3:1-2 ¹Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many *ways*. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. (**NASB95**)

James leads off with the primary command concerning the tongue in 3:1. **Let not many of you become teachers.** This is a general imperative directed at all regenerate, a command. Commands are absolute. If we obey we produce the righteousness of God and enjoy the abundant life. If we disobey it is sin and we experience temporal death, loss of fellowship. In the Greek it literally says, **Do not many of you become teachers.** It's a strict prohibition directed at all who want to teach the word of God on a "professional level" to the congregation. This is not aimed against becoming a Sunday School teacher or teaching one's own children. It is a command not to become a "professional teacher". The professional teachers in their day were the rabbi's. The rabbi's were highly esteemed. Their prestige was desired by others and many sought to be teachers to gain prestige. James is "seeking to restrain the rush to teach on the part of those not qualified."ⁱ Also, in the 1st century congregation they carried over some of the characteristics of the synagogue. In the synagogue the rabbi would teach and then there would be a time when men could stand up and teach. Paul would use these opportunities on his missionary journeys when he would enter the synagogues. The men most prone to stand up and teach would be those who thought they knew something, those who were in their training. Today we'd call them seminary students. Those who are accumulating what we call academic knowledge. Those who have touched on the major issues and think they know it all. It's when the student gets prideful because he's hearing all this doctrine in his training. And so he prematurely wants to start teaching what he's learning. So, James is warning against being so quick to stand up and start teaching. A "teacher" (*didaskalos*) is one who teaches, who instructs others, who tells them what to do, and what he teaches is his "doctrine" (*didaskalia*), the content of instruction. So, when I say "doctrine" I mean "teaching", the content. Who is he to teach? Disciples (*mathetes*). There is a teacher/disciple relationship. The teacher instructs, the disciple learns. By

“disciple” here I mean a “committed disciple”, one who has counted the cost and made the decision to be a pupil who studies Bible doctrine and applies Bible doctrine. All believers should become committed disciples but not many of those should become teachers. There are two categories of teachers in the NT. First, those who are spiritually gifted as teachers. According to Paul in Eph 4:11 God gave spiritually gifted persons to the Church to lay the foundation and to build upon that foundation. I see the Church in two phases; foundational phase and building phase. Four people are listed in Eph 4:11, the first two are gifted for the foundation of the Church and the last two are gifted for the building of the Church. “He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” We maintain that the apostles and prophets were given to the Church during the foundational phase which is Paul’s teaching in Eph 2:20 and corresponds to the 1st century. When those individuals passed away the foundation of the Church had been laid. Once the foundation is laid there is no reason to continue to lay the foundation. Thus, when the purpose of a gift is complete the gift passes away. For example, in the OT, people were gifted to build the Tabernacle. Once the Tabernacle was built there was no use of having a gift for Tabernacle building and so it passed away. It is the same with the gifts in the NT. Once the foundation was laid by the apostles and prophets their function ceased and so they ceased. Then the Church entered the building phase where God gives evangelists and pastor-teachers to build upon the foundation. The difficult question in Eph 4:11 is whether the pastors and teachers are two distinctly gifted persons (pastors and teachers) or two-gifted persons (pastor-teachers). The grammar, often cited as following the Granville-Sharp rule, actually does not solve the dilemma because it applies absolutely only to singular nouns and here the nouns are in the plural.

Art Noun 1 kai Noun 2
τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους
the and pastors and teachers

Yet the single article before pastors and teachers does set these gifts apart from apostles, prophets and evangelists. So, it is best to see pastors as a subset of teachers.



In other words, all pastors are teachers but not all teachers are pastors. Indeed, several NT passages speak only of teachers with no hint of pastor as here in Js 3:1 (cf Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Heb 5:12). So, some have the gift of pastor-teacher and some have the gift of teacher. Both these people have the gift of teacher. This gift is not the gift of gab. It is the ability to study the Scriptures and to communicate the Scriptures. It has two aspects. Not just the ability to talk a lot in front of other people and tell some good stories. People may like that but that's not what the teacher is supposed to be doing. So, a teacher is someone who has the spiritual gift of teacher and is highly trained to study the word of God in the original languages *and* to communicate it to people. Just because a person has the spiritual gift of teacher or pastor-teacher it does not mean they should be teaching. We get spiritual gifts at the moment we're born again. But we're not born mature. We're born infants, spiritual neophytes. We have to grow from infancy to maturity and that involves serious training in the original languages and all the Bible including all the theological issues floating around out there before we are able to responsibly utilize the teaching gift to mature others. This is why it is ridiculous to get together in some Bible study group and we go around and say "Well, what does this mean to you." That's not Bible study, that's sharing your ignorance. It doesn't matter what it means to you, this isn't a matter of opinion. This is a matter of truth, true truth, absolute truth. What matters is what it meant to the original author, what God intended to communicate. So, you have to be highly trained to be able to do this accurately. You've got to be able to study and communicate this. Just as parents aren't trained by their children so mature believers aren't trained by baby believers. You've got to grow to maturity before even considering whether to become a teacher. As our verse teaches, **Let not many of you become teachers.** The verb **become** is *ginomai* and means "to begin to be". It points to the beginning point of formally teaching others on a professional level. Only spiritually mature believers should even consider beginning to teach others. How can one who is immature bring others to maturity? Thus, one should first be a disciple (*mathetes*) before becoming a teacher (*didaskalos*). So, the first category of teachers are those spiritually gifted and all so gifted should utilize their gift once they have matured in Bible doctrine and application of Bible doctrine but great precaution needs to be taken when considering becoming a teacher.

Second, those who are able to teach. All who hold the office of elder should be “able to teach” (*didaktikos*) (1 Tim 3:2). Unlike the deacons those who hold the office of elder should be able to teach. The Greek word in the English is “didactic” and means they are “skillful at organizing and systematically communicating truth”. To qualify for the office of elder a man does not have to possess the spiritual gift of teacher but he must be able to organize and systematically communicate truth. No specific spiritual gift is required to fill the office of elder. Spiritual gifts and offices are distinct. All believers have at least one spiritual gift but not all believers are mature. All who hold an office are required to be mature. So, all elders should be mature enough to teach, able to systematically organize and communicate Bible doctrine. In fact, Hebrews 5:12 implies that, given time, all believers should mature to the point where they are able to teach but certainly not all should become teachers as James warns.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, signifying that he is still addressing on those who are genuinely regenerate (1:18). At no point does James digress to address those who have yet to believe the gospel. He is concerned solely with genuinely regenerate people. **knowing that we will get a more severe/intense judgment.** The participle **knowing** is a perfect tense. They already learned this truth in the past with the effect that they still know it. The truth they know refers strictly to the judgment of teachers at the judgment seat of Christ. Do you want to become a teacher? Just remember, you will be judged more severely at the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is where all genuinely regenerate Church age believers will stand before Christ and give an account for what they have done in the body both good and bad (2 Cor 5:10). Here we learn that there will be degrees of severity at the judgment. Teachers are at the top of the list in terms of severity. The more one handles the word of God before others the more severe his evaluation will be. I like the way the NASB translates this “stricter judgment”. Being a teacher in the church is the most critical human function in the building of the church. The teacher must handle the very word of God. Every word that is said will come into judgment in the day of Christ Jesus (Matt 12:36). And with many words come many errors (Prov 10:19). Therefore, the teacher must study to show himself approved, rightly dividing the word of truth, he must handle the word of God with all accuracy exhausting every known resource to communicate accurately the word of

God. It is common today to hear people say, “You’re over-thinking it. You’re going to deep. You’re taking it too literally.” But that’s more of a commentary on them than the person being accused. It tells me you don’t hold God’s word in very high regard. If you did you would want to search this thing out like the Bereans to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11). Searching out the word of God in depth is never condemned in Scripture. I spent seven hours just translating the first five verses of James 3. Seven hours looking at each word and asking, “Hmm...what is the best way to translate this word into English?” “How can I best communicate the color of this Greek word here?” It’s a delicate and important task. Words are like children, Luther said, they require tender care. It is a dangerous thing to mis-communicate God’s word for it is to attribute to Him something which is not of Him. It is to say He said that which He did not, in fact, say. The role of the teacher is vital in the building and maturity of the church and with many words it is easy to make many errors. It is easy to mislead, it is difficult to lead. There is nothing wrong with striving to be a teacher but consider carefully because you are headed for a stricter judgment (also cf 1 Tim 5:17ff). So also those in authority, the elders should not deny monetary compensation to the elder who works especially hard at the word and teaching. But, at the same time they should also be very slow to lay hands on a man for he needs to be evaluated thoroughly. Paul reasons that the elders themselves will be held responsible for his sins and, of course, we are to keep ourselves free from sin. So, be slow to lay hands on a man. Evaluate him thoroughly. So, the teacher, as well as those who appointed him, will have a stricter judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. People flippantly remark, “Why are you going into all that detail? Who cares about the original languages? Who cares about the historical context? The literary context? The syntax? The mood? The voice? The tense? Why are you going into all that?” Because I’m handling the very word of God! And with that comes great responsibility and stricter judgment. For example, note the word “perfect” in verse 2. I mulled over this word “perfect”. In the Greek this word is *teleios* and means “something that is finished or complete, something that has reached its intended goal, aim or end, something that is full or even something that is perfect” and you work with this word so you can communicate precisely what James is saying here. As you can see there are many senses of *teleios* but what is the sense here in this context? How can I best communicate this word as a teacher of God’s word? “Perfect” confuses me for in the English language it means “no error, one who never sins”. That translation misleads because John says one who

claims he has no sin is a liar and the truth is not in him (1 John 1:8). So, I translated it “mature”. “If a man does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man”. He is a mature believer. He has advanced spiritually and reached maturity. He’s learned how to control his tongue and he’s therefore fit to teach others. It doesn’t mean he never sins. So, beware, the Bible teaches there are degrees of severity at the judgment seat of Christ and those who “become teachers” will undergo the most severe evaluation. It is a serious thing to handle the word of God.ⁱⁱ

For all of us stumble much. This is an explanatory *gar*. **all [of us]** and this is the strongest Greek word for **all** (*hapas*), it is universal in scope. All regenerate people **stumble in much**. The Greek word for **stumble** (*patio*) is a figure of speech in the NT meaning “to fall into sin”. We do not stumble a little, we all **stumble in much**. All regenerate people commit much sin. Just as John told us in his first epistle, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” These kinds of verses are strongly anti-Perfectionism, the Wesleyan doctrine that teaches perfection is within the reach of all believers through a second work of grace that occurs after justification doesn’t seem to fit these verses. They claim Perfectionism (also called *entire sanctification*) is reached instantaneously and is manifested when a believer has such a perfect love for God that he feels no sin. The doctrine does not say that the believer who is perfect does not commit any sin, only that he commits no deliberate sin so that it is an “imperfect perfection” which is an odd and contradictory doctrine. Why say perfection has been attained when we remain imperfect? This doctrine is undoubtedly disproven by this verse and others (cf 1 John 1:8) which clearly assert that all regenerate commit much sin. No regenerate person will reach total perfection in this life. Thus another reason not many should become teachers. We all sin much and the tongue is a dam ready to burst and spew forth a flood of fire.

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. That is, if a man does not sin in his speech, in his words, **he is a mature man**, a *teleios* man. He has spiritually advanced to maturity. You must know how easy it is to err in speech when teaching from the pulpit. It is easy to fall into coarse jesting which is sinful. It is easy to speak inappropriately which too is sinful. It is easy to speak falsely, attributing to God that which He has not said, which again is sinful. This is not a place to be loose with our speech but

to be tight. This is why many godly teachers have written their sermons word for word. It was not uncommon in years past for teachers to read them. Arguably the greatest theological mind America has ever produced read his sermons word for word and not for lack of a brilliant and keen mind. He entered Yale College at the age of 12. He later became well-known for his sermon titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741), his name was Jonathan Edwards.ⁱⁱⁱ As brilliant as he was he wrote and read his sermons word for word. Most would think, "What a bore." but he became the intellectual leader of the Great Awakening. And, is it not with a keen awareness of the dangers of the tongue that one would do so? I find in so writing and reading a keen awareness of the ease with which our tongues stumble and a godly desire to flee from such danger. Popular extemporaneous preaching is the vogue nowadays but equally they have less to say and I assure you there is much more stumbling and bumbling than clarity and righteousness of thought. Thus, if one does not stumble in words **he is a mature man**. The measure of maturity is a man's words. It takes only brief exposure to a man's words to tell if that man is spiritually mature.

Let me now interject a notion here, subtle in the text, but clearly present. What do you notice about the gender of this sentence? Is it masculine or feminine? In the NASB you see the word **anyone** and that seems neuter but it's actually masculine, **If a man** not **If anyone**. Also note the word **man** mid-verse. That's the Greek word *aner* meaning "an adult male in opposition to a female". Why does James do this? Can't men and women be teachers? A lot of people want to call James and Paul patriarchal bigots. Well, I'm sorry, but the Bible gives good reasons, despite the evangelical feminist's plea for full equality between males and females. Males and males only are given authority to teach the word of God professionally to the whole congregation. Put another way, it's sinful for a woman to teach openly in the congregation. This may not be popular, it may agitate you, it may have been rejected by Episcopal, Methodist and Lutheran clergy but that is the teaching of the word of God. Paul taught the same thing as we'll show. We've got a lot of groups caving in in this area. They're called evangelical feminists. That's someone who holds a high view of Scripture but believes the Bible teaches the full equality of males and females without role distinctions. Let's see what Paul has to say about this in 1 Tim 2:11-15. "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness." I don't see much wiggle room in there. I only see one channel open there and it's the receiver. ¹²But I do not

allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Paul shuts down the other channel. If this agitates you I’m sorry, it’s the word of God. You can argue “Oh, that was just for that ancient bigoted patriarchal society” but if that’s the case then why did Paul give doctrinal reasons that go back to creation? Where do we get meaning? From context. What does Paul insist is the ultimate context for understanding why women don’t teach men? Creation. ¹³“For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.” The order of creation, Paul insists, sets up the order of instruction. ¹⁴“*And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*” The event of the Fall Paul insists further argues for the order of instruction. Evangelical feminists reject this interpretation. To get around the plain meaning of the text they restrict it to an individual situation experienced by the original audience in the 1st century so that it has no application for churches today. The problem with this is in the next chapter, 1 Tim 3:14-15. What is the purpose of Paul’s letter to Timothy? ¹⁴“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” The letter is written to Timothy so he can instruct the congregation how to properly conduct themselves in church.^{iv} You can’t limit this to an ancient church. Men only are to be professional teachers in the church. Paul is in harmony with James’ statement **If a man does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man**. If this agitates you, well, all I can say is Paul said, exercise some “self-restraint” (1 Tim 2:15). I think you ought to be glad you don’t have the responsibility on your shoulders. God has a plan and God has specific roles for women and men and these complement one another. When men fulfill their roles it enhances women and when women fill their roles it enhances men. Now, does that mean women can’t teach in any capacity? No. Older women should teach younger women (we have too little of this going on) and women should teach their children (again we have too little of this going on) but it expressly forbids women teaching men (we have far too much of this going on). Well, we’ll have to stop there this week and get into the illustrations next week, with our heads bowed and our eyes closed.

ⁱ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jas 3:1.

ⁱⁱ For references including both *lambano* and *mega* and *krima* as “receiving a more intense judgment” see **Mt 23:13 [14]** v.l. (cp. κριμα 4b); **Mk 12:40**; **Lk 20:47**;) cf William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*,

"Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frhchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.", 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 584.

iii Timothy Larsen, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, 201-205.

iv Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 373-377.

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