

## CHAPTER III

### Teacher and Tongue, 3:1-12

1) James now takes up "swift to hear, slow to speak," which were mentioned in 1:19 and develops "slow to speak" as he developed "swift to hear" in 1:19-27. A general connection is obvious: proper hearing of the Word will not make us respecters of persons (2:1-13) nor people with dead faith (2:14-26); proper hearing will bridle the tongue (1:26) and will not put the needy off with mere words (2:15, etc.).

**Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment!** The admonition is again most fraternal. 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. We should think of the early churches in which any members might speak in the meetings. First Corinthians 14:26-34 is instructive: any brother might contribute some word; yet Paul lays down restrictions: it must be for the purpose of edifying only, must occur in due order, two or three only are to speak, and the women must keep silent. James has the same ideas. "Teachers" does not mean "elders" in the pastoral office; it refers to members who arise in the meeting in order to instruct their fellow members.

The participle states the reason that many should not want to avail themselves of this privilege: "since you know that we shall receive greater judgment." James says that "we shall receive"; he includes himself. He is teaching in this epistle and is a teaching elder in the congregation at Jerusalem. He shows

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that he feels the weight of responsibility or rather his accountability because of thus teaching.

Everyone of us who assumes to teach, whether he is in office or not, shall receive greater or heavier (R. V.) judgment, namely from God. God will hold us the more answerable. This, of course, means in case we are faulty or wrong in what we teach or in the manner of our teaching. The claim that "to receive judgment" means "to receive condemnation" (A. V.) goes too far. James did not expect condemnation for his teaching, nor does he intend to say that all teachers will be condemned. *Κρίμα* is and remains a *vox media*. God will look more closely at all teachers when he judges them. Teachers undertake to convey God's Word in the way in which God wants it conveyed; God will judge them on that score. Those who do not teach will, of course, not be judged in this way.

The damage that wrong teaching, whether it be in substance or in manner, may cause is indicated by what James later says about the tongue. Untold damage may result; we see it everywhere to this day. This text about the judgment that teachers shall receive cannot be impressed too deeply upon all who teach to-day, whether they do it professionally or as volunteers.

2) Why this mention of judgment? **For in many things we stumble all.** Like I John 1:8, James makes no exception. *Πολλά* is an adverbial accusative: "as regards many things." "Stumble" recalls 2:10; James does not say "fall," for this connotes the fatal falling, and such a fall takes place only once. To stumble (iterative present) is figurative for sinning without falling from grace. One stumbles and yet goes forward on the road; when he falls fatally or, as the Greek may state it, falls to the side, his Christian career is ended. This is James's great confession of sin. It includes far more than sins of teaching or even sins of the tongue. James places these sins into