

## “Be Not ... Teachers”

by Bill Crews

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Jesus, after His resurrection and before His ascension, said to His apostles, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of (KJV — teach) all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). He also said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk. 16:15). Certain Hebrew Christians were rebuked for not teaching: “For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12). Then the importance of teaching the word and the necessity of every faithful Christian teaching that word was emphasized by Paul to Timothy: “And the things which thou has heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men (generic for men and women, not men in the sense of males — BC) who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). If we learn anything at all from the New Testament it is this: (1) The lost cannot be saved without teaching (Jn. 6:44-45; Rom. 1:16; 10:13-17; Acts 11:13-14). (2) The saved cannot be faithful without being teachers (Heb. 5:12; 2 Tim. 2:2).

With all this before us, how strong to our ears are the words: “**Be not many of you teachers**” (James 3:1). Does God want Christians to resort to teaching or to refrain from teaching? Certainly God is not fickle, nor does He contradict Himself. We would do well to look at the context of James 3:1 and to try to understand the ominous words we have quoted.

The second chapter of James shows that faith must be active, submissive to God’s will, obedient, not inactive, fruitless, dead. The third chapter shows that servants of God must control their tongue or be very careful with their words. The tongue is an instrument by which much evil or much good can be done; words have great potential for good, but they also have great potential for evil. Since the greatest words of all are the words of the gospel, then the greatest use of the tongue is to teach others the words of the gospel. But if the tongue does not present the gospel in its purity, it will do harm and not good. Another gospel is not to be either preached or received (Gal. 1:8-9). A perverted gospel cannot save (Gal. 1:6-7). Error will cause men to perish (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

When God’s word says, “*Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment,*” God isn’t saying, “**I don’t want you to be teachers.**” Nor is He saying, “**I only need a few teachers, so I don’t want many of you to make teachers out of yourselves.**” It is rather a way of calling our attention to the seriousness of teaching the word of God and to the grave responsibility resting upon anyone who engages in such teaching. Let none embark upon so great a task (1) who isn’t aware of the heavier judgment that he will receive, (2) who isn’t determined to study diligently and to ground himself thoroughly in the revelation of God’s word, (3) who isn’t willing to pay the price to equip himself to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error (Heb. 5:14), (4) who isn’t committed to teaching only what is supported by the Scriptures, (5) who doesn’t realize that in a sense the destiny of souls is in his hands, (6) who will not fail to remind himself always that he will answer to God for what he teaches, and (7) who isn’t determined to always practice what he teaches.

There are passages that depict teachers (1) as failing to practice truth that they teach (Matt. 23:1-3; Rom. 2:21-24), (2) as being ignorant of their subject matter (1 Tim. 1:7), (3) as perverting the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7), (4) as teaching for money or for whatever they might get from others for themselves (2 Pet. 2:3; 2 Cor. 2:17), (5) as having the wrong motives even while preaching some things that were correct (Phil. 1:15-17). Let us rather follow good examples such as Paul: (1) His aim was to please God, not men (1 Thess. 2:4; Gal. 1:10); (2) he was willing to lose his life in his efforts to carry the truth to the lost (Acts 20:24); he spoke God’s wisdom in God’s words, never seeking to impress men with Paul (1 Cor. 2:1-13); (4) he neither resorted to flattery nor was motivated by covetousness (1 Thess. 2:5); (5) he never sought glory of men (1 Thess. 2:6); (6) he loved the souls of men and cared genuinely about their spiritual welfare and destiny — gentle like a nursing mother, exhorting and encouraging like a father (1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11); (7) he said, “*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel*” (1 Cor. 9:16); (8) he also said, “*I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some*” (1 Cor. 9:22); (9) he knew the importance of keeping the gospel pure: “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema*” (Gal. 1:8).

If you are a Christian, by all means, be a teacher of God’s word, but be a teacher that will please God, not displease Him; be a teacher that will preserve the gospel, not corrupt it; be a teacher that will save souls, not cause them to be lost; and be a teacher who is aware of the heavier judgment that awaits him, not one who is irresponsible or reckless.

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