

James 3:1-2

I. Speaking ministries are more strictly judged (1)

A. Brothers, not many of you should become teachers (1a)

The address “brothers” is James’ regular marker for a change of topic

The advice for few to become teachers seems counter intuitive. One would expect that more teachers would be better. But the reason given below explains that for teachers, quality is more important than quantity. It is better to have fewer teachers, who are good teachers, than many who are poor or false teachers.

Because teachers are so influential (because words are so influential, see vv. 3-8), teachers are of necessity held to a higher standard

B. Reason: Teachers will experience greater judgment (1b-c)

1. Knowing that: (1b)

2. We will receive greater judgment (1c)

Notice the shift to first person plural, James places himself as a teacher with them

“judgment” is both the process of evaluation – which could generate either a positive or a negative verdict – and the imposition of this verdict in either reward or punishment

“greater judgment” could mean stricter standard of judgment

It could also mean harsher punishment for failing to meet the standard

Most likely, it is a combination of both ideas, -cf. Matt. 23:14

Notice the future tense – they will receive, most likely referring to the final judgment at the Parousia of Christ -cf. 5:8

II. Reason: Words are not only more important, but more difficult to control perfectly (2)

A. For all stumble in many things (2a)

“stumble” is the literal meaning of the word, which is almost certainly meant to be taken figuratively as some sort of moral failure in sin and error

This is a general statement acknowledging the sinfulness and failure of all humanity in order to prepare for the specific statement in the next phrase

It acknowledges sin in many areas in order to highlight sin in one specific issue

B. But our words are the most difficult thing to control (2b-c)

1. Condition: If someone does not stumble in word (2b)

This proposition focuses on one issue – stumbling/sinning with words

Literally, “stumble in word” – certainly referring to speech, and most likely specifically referring to the speech used in teaching, although the following context allows for a wider application

Notice that this is formed in the negative – the person who does NOT stumble. This is to prepare for the point in the next proposition

2. This one is a perfect man – able to exercise control over the entire body (2c)

One who does not stumble in word is called a perfect/mature man – one who has reached the pinnacle/goal of moral development

If someone can control his speech, he can control everything. He can control his entire body

The implication is that the tongue/speech is the most difficult thing to control, cf. vv. 3-12, esp. vv. 7-8

This is the reason that teachers are held to the highest standard - that their speech is difficult to control, and needs to be all the more carefully guarded

This, of course, leaves open the possibility that teachers can control their speech by the grace of God, for the good of God’s people

So teachers should not take their calling lightly, but seriously strive to become careful and mature in their speech