

The Teacher and His Responsibility

“Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards” (*MSG*).

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly” (*NLT*)
(James 3:1).

Objectives

1. Reveal what takes place at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
2. Provide an understanding of what is meant by the *Bema*.
3. Explain how the Word of God will judge us.
4. Recognize the various types of rewards or awards to be given at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
5. Identify various responsibilities of the Bible School teacher.
6. Explain what James is referring to when he states that teachers will be judged more strictly.
7. Point out three things teachers are to do with truth.
8. Compare how words can lead someone closer to, or further from, Christ.
9. Explain the power involved in each of the illustrations James uses in Chapter 3.
10. Reveal James' main concern (in James 3) when it comes to teachers.

Introduction

The role of the Bible school teacher encompasses multiple responsibilities.

A Bible school teacher...

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1. *Imparts* knowledge and passes truth to the next generation (2 Timothy 2:2). Prior to her untimely death in the Challenger disaster, Christa McAuliffe expressed, “I touch the future. I teach.”
2. *Prepares* students for effective works of service in apostolic ministry (Ephesians 4:12).
3. *Assists* in the spiritual formation and transformation of students. Teaching is about changing lives. D. L. Moody said, “The Scriptures were not given for our inspiration but for our transformation.” Teachers are catalysts or agents of change.
4. *Disciples* others to be obedient to the commands of Christ. I’m sure you’ve noticed the first time the word “Christian” was used in God’s Word. “They assembled themselves with the church, and *taught much people*. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26, emphasis mine). That identification was a direct result of teaching.
5. *Fulfills* the Great Commission. Christ’s final message on earth can be narrowed down to two words, “Teach...teaching” (Matthew 28:19-20).
6. *Motivates* students to lifelong learning and pressing toward perfection. Alan Redpath said, “The conversion of a soul is the miracle of the moment, the manufacture of a saint is a task of a lifetime.”
7. *Sets* the example: shows the way, and goes the way, so others can imitate and follow (John 13: 12, 15; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Participants in a recent faculty education program identified a teacher as a:

- Man of Truth
- Man of Influence
- Man of Example

Gil Rugh explains teachers are required to do (at least) three things:

Know the truth	Without knowing the truth you cannot teach others.	2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 1:3-11
Live the truth	Godliness should characterize all believers; especially leaders. Leaders are to be teachers of the Word.	1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9
Teach the truth	There is a famine of sound Bible teaching today.	Amos 8:11; 2 Timothy 4:3-4

“NOT MANY [of you] should become teachers (self-constituted censors and reprovers of others), my brethren, for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people; thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation]” (James 3:1, AMP).

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Reading James 3:1 one may wonder, “Why is James so hard on teachers? And what’s this about stricter, more severe judgment? How is that possible? Why is it so?” A quest for answers sends us to the Word and supplementary resources.

First of all, let us look at the judgment referred to. All believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to how each one taught and lived. We will provide an account for our actions. Our lives will be evaluated based on our works and what we have done (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). This will be judgment in the sense of receiving or losing a reward (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). The Bible will judge what we have done (1 Corinthians 3:13); what we have said (Matthew 12:36-37); what we believe (2 Timothy 2:15); and how we have spent our time. We should live in faithful obedience to Christ, knowing our works will one day be revealed and tested. Our lives and teaching must please and honor Christ. When we exercise our duties with excellence and faithfulness we have nothing to fear when it comes to God’s greater strictness on teachers of His Word. Our Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, will bring to light or disclose our walk and works (1 Corinthians 4:5). This examination will be stern but also possesses a commendation aspect.

The *Bema* was a raised platform where the Roman magistrate or leader sat, made decisions, and passed a verdict. In Paul’s day, and among the Greeks, it was a place where athletes would compete for the prize under the watchful inspection of judges. They verified that all rules were followed (2 Timothy 2:5). The champion was led by the judge, to the podium, to receive his reward. For the Christian, our reward(s) are eternal. Our service to God will be reviewed and rewarded. The Word of God speaks of rewards (2 John 7-8; Revelation 22:12); crowns (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10), treasures (1 Timothy 6:19), and commendation (Matthew 25:21). To hear Jesus say, “Well done,” will be the greatest reward of all. Let’s make it our life’s ambition not to be disqualified in the race (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In order to win the contest, receive the prize, and hear the Lord’s applause, approval and acclamation teachers need to discharge their teaching ministry and responsibility with precision. Why?

Teachers fulfill a vital ministry. Teaching is the revival ministry of the church. However, in many areas the role of teaching is downplayed today. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons false teachings or better put, no teaching, abounds. In the Early Church, teaching was essential (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11).

Teachers have a great responsibility. Teachers need to carefully consider the seriousness of responsibility involved. There are rewards to be gained, and consequences to be shunned. The teacher is responsible for *what* and *how* he teaches God’s Word. Was our teaching Scripturally-based, accurate, and truthful? Did we live it? Did we teach truth in love?

“Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!” (Luke 12:48, MSG).

Teachers carry out a grave, weighty, momentous task. Like marriage, it is not to be entered into lightly. We will all give account. Teachers can, and should, lead people to truth. However, teachers could—God forbid—just as easily lead them to error.

Teachers are subject to greater accountability. Increased responsibility equals or calls for increased accountability. God holds teachers responsible for the lives and spiritual growth of those under them.

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Answerability is protective. It guards both the teacher and the student. Everyone should be responsible to someone.

Teachers set the example. The teacher should live what he teaches. Some say, “Practice what you preach.” It is better said, “Teach what you practice.” Failure to live according to one’s teaching is met with severe consequences. Sammy Stewart once said, “Our doctrine is best preserved when we become practitioners of our doctrine.”

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8).

Teachers have a tremendous influence in the body of Christ. New believers depend on teachers for their spiritual depth and growth. Teachers make a difference.

Teachers should receive God’s stamp of approval. It is better to seek the endorsement of God, and be more concerned about pleasing Him, than the approval of men.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3).

Teachers are given great dignity. Teachers amass great respect and distinction. This is enhanced by the potential for condemnation. One African proverb warns the higher a monkey climbs up the tree, the easier it is to see its backside.

Teachers receive immense trust and are subject to enormous expectations. Many times human behavior is such that we first believe in the person, before we believe in his teaching. Students are susceptible and have admiration, confidence and respect for their teachers. We should be careful never to misuse or abuse these kindnesses. Those taught have high expectations of those that teach.

Teachers are involved in serious business. It is a matter of life or death. Eternity is in the balance. Mistakes, whether intentional or unintentional, bring destructive consequences. Teachers are guides, not misguides.

A story is told of a terrible storm that was raging across the eastern part of the United States, making the progress of the train difficult. Among the passengers was a woman with a child, who was concerned lest she got off at the wrong station. A gentleman, seeing her anxiety, said: “Do not worry, I know the road well, and I will tell you when you come to your station.”

In due course the train stopped at the station before the one at which the woman wanted to get off. “The next station will be yours,” said the gentleman.

As they went on, in a few minutes the train stopped.

“Now is your turn, Madam. Get out quickly!”

The woman took up the child and thanking the man, she left the train. At the next stop, the brakeman called out the name of the station where the woman had wished to get off.

“You have already stopped at this station,” called the man to the brakeman.

“No sir,” he replied, “something was wrong with the engine, and we stopped for a few moments to repair it!”

“Oh, no” cried the other man, “I put that woman off in the storm when the train stopped between stations.”

As they went back they found the lady dead (frozen to death in the storm) with the child lifeless in her arms. It was the mistake of misguided directions.

Teachers utilize a deadly weapon. A chief mark of holiness is the ability to control one’s tongue. Teachers must be careful not to misuse this tiny member that wields immense power. Its use has a great bearing on the teacher’s condemnation. James was concerned with the communication of teachers. The *Life Application Commentary* stated, “As works reveal the depth of a person’s faith, so words show the depth of a person’s maturity.”

James’ use of a bit, rudder, tongue, and spark all has something in common. They are small but direct something larger than themselves. They are also controllers. Warren Wiersbe in *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* said, “The size of a thing does not determine its value or power.” He also said, “We often think that our words are unimportant, but the wrong word can direct the listener into the wrong paths. An idle word, a questionable story, a half-truth, or a deliberate lie could change the course of life and lead it to destruction. On the other hand, the right word, used by the Spirit, could direct a soul out of sin and into salvation....The wrong word at the wrong time could break a heart or lead a person astray.”

Wiersbe provides the following explanation of the illustrations James used.

Power to direct	The bit and rudder	Verses 3 – 4
Power to destroy	The fire and animal	Verses 5 – 8
Power to delight	The fountain and tree	Verses 9 –12

Teachers acquire knowledge of the Word of God. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God’ (Mark 12:24, *NKJV*).

How can we guarantee God’s approval rather than His condemnation? “Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, *AMP*).

To avoid misinterpretation we must learn how to provide correct interpretation. Stable principles of interpretation must be employed. Of course, it goes without saying, it is not only important to study, but to obey what we’ve learned.

Teachers attract strict standards. Teachers are held to the strictest of requirements by administration, leadership, followers, and last but certainly not least, God. The world enjoys drawing attention to leaders who fail to follow what they teach. It gives them license or an excuse to live as they please. Teachers must be careful of what they say and do.

“And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47-48, *NKJV*).

“Do you think you can trap others without bringing destruction on yourselves?” (Ezekiel 13:18, *NLT*).

Teachers grow roots in our lives. They provide a strong anchor. No one wants to be a tree with weak roots, or a house built on the sand. People, churches, and organizations can drift from the truth. One man made a remark to a friend that a Christian college was now teaching all the branches of learning.

His young friend responded, “Yes, it now has all of the branches and none of the roots.”

It is possible to teach and preach things that are only branches of the tree—non-essential—but what people like to hear. It is imperative to teach subjects that are the roots and anchors of Christianity.

Teachers handle God’s Word carefully and accurately. We have received an inheritance. “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). The phrase “handling deceitfully” originally meant “to catch with bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error.” I would hope a Bible school teacher would never deliberately ensnare or corrupt his students. However, we must still be careful, accurate, and never careless when teaching God’s Word. Knowledge is a prerequisite for teaching any subject.

Teachers touch future generations. The teacher impresses himself (and Christ) on the hearts and minds of others. Teaching touches a single life, an entire generation, and indirectly those that follow. This point has already been made in the first section of this lesson but justifies repeating. The Church is always one generation away from extinction. We hold the future in our classrooms. Our students are like wet cement. Impressions made, positive or negative, last for eternity.

Many times when churches move away from truth it is because seminaries, Bible schools, and Bible school teachers fail in training the leaders. Timothy Beougher and Alvin Reid in *Evangelism for a Changing World* cautioned, “When a denomination’s theology changes, that change almost always begins in the seminaries that train its leaders.” This is a sharp warning for all who teach in Bible schools. Teachers enjoy many rewards and privileges. We pass on truth; securing the future of the church. We impact lives, develop ministries, and prepare men and women for works of service in God’s kingdom. We play a vital role in fulfilling the Great Commission. We remain in the hearts and minds of our students for years to come. When we get to heaven, it will be so rewarding to see students we taught, and to know how they have been responsible in reaching others as an extension of our ministries.

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Lesson in Review

1. How many Christians will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? _____

2. What are some of the things God's Word will judge? _____

3. What was traditionally judged at the *Bema* for the Greeks? _____

4. What type of commendation do we want to receive from the Lord? _____

5. What does James 3:1 say concerning teachers? _____

6. At a faculty education program teachers identified a teacher as a man of what three things?

7. According to Gill Rugh, what three things should teachers do with truth? _____

8. Prove that teaching was important in the Early Church. _____

9. According to Sammy Stewart, what is the best way to preserve apostolic doctrine? _____

10. Explain or identify the deadly weapon utilized by teachers. _____

11. How can one guarantee God's approval rather than His condemnation? _____

12. When a denomination's theology changes, that change almost always begins where? _____
