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A HIGHER CALLING

By Pastor Doug Winne

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." – James 3:1 (ESV)

Former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial is now past. Many made the case against him but, in the end, they lacked the two-thirds vote of the U.S. Senate to convict him. Some opposed the entire process as an "impeachment" has historically been used most principally to remove someone from an elected office. Given that Donald Trump is no longer serving as president the case seemed somewhat moot. But others argued that a precedent was being set by the proceedings – somewhat akin to a court awarding an injured party an exorbitant sum not so much to compensate them for their personal loss but rather **to warn others** of the threat that awaits them if they should err in a similar way.

Part of the case that was made against the former president is that given his position (as president) what he said, inferred, wrote, or defended could not and should not be viewed in the same way as any other American citizen. And so, it was argued, "this is not a case of freedom of speech" (protected by the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution). And "given his office, a president is held to a higher standard."

This is what James is arguing here in James chapter 3: a teacher is held to a higher standard given that his role, as a teacher, is a high calling from God. Any and every public speaker (Christian or otherwise) knows the truthfulness of this statement. George Herbert Walker Bush, while still serving under Ronald Reagan, like many other vice-presidents both before and after him, on occasion misspoke. But he did it enough that it was suggested that he, as one who had been born into wealth, was born "with a silver foot in his mouth." And certainly plenty has been made of President Biden's many examples of misspeaking that took place while he served as vice-president under Barack Obama.

So what is the application of this to us?

1. Take it seriously if you happen to be in a place of leadership. There IS a higher calling, a "greater strictness." Your goal should be to help lift people to a higher plane, not to try and bring yourself down to the lowest plane of humanity.
2. On the other hand, there needs to be some grace shown to those who are in these places of greater strictness. When I have heard people criticize a politician (of either party) for some statement (e.g., referencing their being in Vermont when in fact they were in New Hampshire), I think, "Ha! YOU try being on the road for 45 days straight, speaking multiple times a day, and always in a new location, and just see how you do!" So too, more than a few Christian pastors have, here and there, said things that they later regretted ever came out of their mouths.
3. Beyond the judgment of men, we each will someday appear the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Here and there, as teachers, some of us may have said things that were off, wrong, or even ill intended. Even if on earth we got away with those statements, we are reminded here that we will also be giving an account of these statements to Christ. So before we speak rashly, or harshly, or stupidly, maybe we would do well to slow down and speak more carefully.