



The Gift of Teaching

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

In **Romans 12:3**, Paul said, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think...” Some Christians simply think too highly of themselves. They either think that everything rests on them and their ability to do everything or perhaps they think what they are good at is what is best to be good at. Sure, there are some things they can’t do, but those things aren’t important anyway. I’ve met people like this. Sadly, I’ve been people like this. But there is another similar problem. Some people think too lowly of themselves. They think that whatever they can do is not important. If only they could be like someone else. Or they constantly try to do what others are good at so they can look good themselves. This leads to frustration and burn out.

In **Romans 12:3-8**, Paul demonstrates a different approach, a humble approach. Paul explained that God has blessed each of us with differing gifts. As such, we need to learn to appreciate the differences and the roles they open up for each of us within the body of Christ. Perhaps you are a lousy teacher, but you are great at recognizing needs and providing for them. You are just as much a part of the body as the teacher. Perhaps you are not very good at providing comfort and encouragement, you never think to write notes, and are always looking back and remembering you needed to visit someone but forgot, but you are great at organizing and teaching Bible class lessons. You are just as much a part of the body as the encourager.

This leaves us with the big question. What’s my place in the local congregation? How do I fit in this puzzle? That is what this series of lessons is about: helping you find your fit. Instead of repeatedly suffering burn-out because you keep trying to fit yourself as a square peg into a round hole, find out where God has gifted you, then set yourself loose in that area of ministry within the congregation. You won’t suffer burn-out: you’ll be revitalized.

In an earlier lesson, we talked about the gift of service. In today’s lesson, we’ll examine the gift of teaching. Please understand the point of these lessons is not to rate and rank the gifts and functions themselves. None of these is better; they are simply different. The point of these lessons is to help you assess where your giftedness lies and therefore determine how you can best function, minister, and motivate others within this congregation and the body of Christ at large. If you discover you are a teacher, the big question will be, what are you doing with that?

Discussion:

I. Am I a teacher?

- A. No doubt, there is a sense in which all of us are to teach. In fact, the Hebrew writer rebuked many of the Hebrew Christians in **Hebrews 5:11-14** because they had not progressed on to teaching. However, there are clearly some who are more gifted to fill that role than others. After all, **I Timothy 3:2** demonstrates that we will all be at different levels of ability in teaching when it gives our shepherds the qualification of “able to teach.” While we all want to grow in our ability to teach and we all want to learn how to capitalize on any opportunities to teach that we have, some among us have a special, almost natural-seeming knack at teaching. With that ability comes responsibility. If you have this gift, you need to be functioning in it within this body of believers. That is why God put you here.
- B. You may be wondering, “Is that my place? Am I a teacher?” Allow me to share five characteristics of the gift of teaching by looking at an oft overlooked teacher in the New Testament. Luke was a great teacher. So great, in fact, he was used by God as one of the four recorders of the gospel of Jesus and the only one to teach about the early history of the church. I want to examine Luke’s introduction to his gospel in **Luke 1:1-4** and share with you five characteristics of teachers.
 1. *Teachers want to confirm facts for themselves:* Though many had “undertaken to compile a narrative” of what Jesus had done, Luke didn’t simply hand Theophilus someone else’s research. He followed all things closely himself. He examined what the eyewitnesses and ministers had delivered. He did the work himself. Teachers often want to confirm the facts for themselves. They are not satisfied hearing someone’s sermon or reading someone’s article. They want to get into the Word themselves to see if what is said is really so.
 2. *Teachers generally enjoy research and study:* Luke must have done all kinds of research in preparing his gospel account. He talked to eyewitnesses. He talked with Paul. He checked his facts. He had to find out when certain things happened and examine the history to give accurate descriptions of when they happened. As a

Gentile, he did not grow up reading the Law. He would have had to research what the Law said to make statements as he did in **Luke 2:22-24**. That took way more than running down to the local library or religious bookstore and picking up a copy of the Bible. Teachers are interested in knowledge and in passing on that knowledge. Therefore, they generally enjoy spending time researching whatever subjects they are passionate about. Reading the Bible, making connections, figuring things out are fun for the teacher.

3. *Teachers tend to focus on facts over feelings:* Luke wasn't interested in pumping up Theophilus's certainty with personal experiences and feelings. He wanted to give him the facts. Here is what the eyewitnesses said happened. You can believe that Jesus is the Son of God because of these objective facts, not simply because of how we feel about Him. It is no surprise that as Luke moves from his introduction to his narrative that the first thing he does is share a fact about the timeline: "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah..." (**Luke 1:5**). Notice another great example of this in **Luke 2:1-2**. Teachers often want to remove the feelings and try to be completely objective (though no one ever truly is). They are not nearly so concerned about what you feel, or sometimes even think, about a text as they are just what the text says.
4. *Teachers want to know and present the truth with certainty:* Why did Luke write this account? So Theophilus would have certainty about the truth. Luke wanted to help remove doubts. While this is written to Theophilus, this work, no doubt, helped Luke in his own certainty as well. He wasn't satisfied with mere maybes and speculation. He wanted certainty. The teacher sees the truth as the means to all other aspects of Christianity. So, they want to know and present the truth with certainty.
5. *Teachers tend to present what they know in an orderly and organized fashion:* Why wasn't Luke simply satisfied with what all the others had done to talk about what Jesus had done? He wanted to put it in orderly fashion. Someone told a story here; another a story there. Luke wanted it to fit into an organized whole (not necessarily a chronological one, but an organized one). Teachers like to present things in an organized way. They like outlines, major points, natural flow. They want point A to lead to point B and then to point C. They like their supporting arguments to fit all in a row. They struggle with scattered, circular, or shotgun thinking and teaching. They want the teaching to be like a row of dominoes, knock the first one over and then watch the rest fall into place.

C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need teachers like you.

II. The struggles of the teacher.

- A. As you can imagine, while there are strengths that go along with this natural giftedness, there are also some natural weaknesses. There are some struggles teachers often have to face and overcome. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, you are not a bad person. This is simply an assessment of your natural bent. If you score high on these, don't beat yourself up. Rather, recognize it simply means your role within this congregation may be as a teacher. Don't get upset, rather get energized to start working in your role and capitalizing on your strengths.
- B. This part of the lesson was hard to put together simply because when we think of weaknesses and teachers, we tend to simply think "false teacher." Additionally, in the Bible, we tend to simply see the teaching and not much of the personality behind the one teaching. However, I think we can see some danger zones for teachers based on the warnings Paul gave to Timothy in his letters. I'm not saying Timothy necessarily suffered from all these weaknesses and struggles, but as Paul warned Timothy about other teachers, talked about his own teaching, and offered advice and admonition to Timothy about his teaching, we can uncover five danger zones for teachers, five struggles and potential weaknesses for teachers.

1. *Teachers can take too much pride in their own knowledge (I Timothy 6:20):* Teachers can be enamored with knowledge. Paul, therefore, warned Timothy not to get caught up in what was falsely called knowledge. Like the Gnostics, teachers can sometimes think too much of their own knowledge. They can think their knowledge sets them on a pedestal above everyone else. It makes them one of the enlightened few and then look down on others who don't quite get it like they do.
2. *Teachers can become puffed up about their role as teachers (I Timothy 1:6-7):* Paul warned Timothy against men who seemed to think that somehow being a teacher was a super-special role. Even though they didn't understand their confident assertions, they wanted to be looked on as teachers. Perhaps out of all the roles and functions, the teachers most need to heed Paul's warning in **Romans 12:3** not to think too much of themselves. Let's face it, being the voice in the congregation can become a pretty heady experience. It often puts the teachers in front of other people, heading up classes, conducting studies, being out front. When teachers aren't careful they can tend to think too much of their own role in the congregation.
3. *Teachers can tend toward argument and quarreling (I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:23-24):* Paul went out of his way to explain that teachers should not be quarrelsome. Sadly, because of the pride that teachers are sometimes subject to, they are not quick to listen to others with different perspectives. Rather, they get quickly defensive about their own positions and opinions. That leads them to get quarrelsome and argumentative. Cer-

tainly, everyone should be able to defend the truth of the Gospel. But often times teachers can move beyond simply defending the Gospel, taking the disagreements personally and then get into defending themselves. That is when it has become argumentative and quarrelsome.

4. *Teachers can mistake increased knowledge for spiritual growth (I Timothy 4:11-12):* Though Timothy was apparently a good enough teacher to be granted all kinds of responsibility in teaching and preaching, Paul still felt the need to warn him to actually live the teaching. Why? Because teachers sometimes mistake increased knowledge for spiritual growth. I remember when I finished my year and a half working with Harold Comer and David Thomley in a training program as a preacher. David took me out for coffee and he asked me two questions. The first was whether or not I thought I was a better preacher and teacher than when I started. The answer was absolutely and unequivocally yes. The second question was whether or not I thought I was a better Christian than when I started. When he first asked the question, I didn't understand. Since the first answer was yes, how could this answer be any different? But then it sank in. Knowing more and being better able to teach it are not the same as growing in it. In extreme cases, I've known teachers to think that their ability to teach well actually offset the sexual immorality of multiple affairs. But even when not that extreme, teachers can tend to be satisfied with simply knowing more and not always grow spiritually.
 5. *Teachers are easily discouraged when others don't listen and heed the teaching (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 4:1-5).* While other Christians tend to get more discouraged based on the way people treat them, teachers tend to get discouraged based on how people listen to them. The mere tenor of Paul's letters to Timothy demonstrate the ease with which teachers can be discouraged away from their work. But Paul offered some specific statements that showed Timothy's discouragement. He had to remind him on multiple occasions that there would be people who simply wouldn't listen (I Timothy 4:1-6; II Timothy 3:1-10). But we can't allow that to discourage us into not teaching. They can also get really discouraged when they don't live up to their own teaching, wondering if they should even be the teacher.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and in this congregation may just be as a teacher. Don't be too upset with yourself about these weaknesses. Sure, they demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need teachers.

III. Opportunities in the local church for the teacher to motivate and encourage.

- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as a teacher in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my teaching ability?"
- B. Some opportunities to teach for the congregation as a whole.
 1. Teaching adult classes
 2. Teaching children's classes
 3. Lord's Supper talk
 4. Preaching sermons
 5. Wednesday night invitations
 6. Writing articles for the bulletin
 7. Writing articles for the website
 8. Leading workshops or special seminars
 9. Organizing curriculum
 10. Teaching VBS
- C. Some opportunities to teach in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Home Bible study groups
 2. Teenage Bible studies
 3. Backyard Bible school for kids
 4. Blogging
 5. Writing newsletters
 6. One-on-one studies with others
 7. New Converts studies
 8. Retreats and offsite studies
 9. Writing letters
 10. Over the internet studies
- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 1. Evangelistic teaching and Bible studies
 2. Teaching in hospitals and nursing homes
 3. Teaching in prisons
 4. Using community opportunities to teach
 5. Bible studies with co-workers
 6. Neighborhood Bible studies
 7. Correspondence Courses
 8. Online articles
 9. Internet radio programs
 10. Newspaper articles

IV. Improving your teaching (help for the non-teacher).

- A. As we've recognized, not all of us have our greatest gift in teaching. But we all have some responsibility to grow in teaching ability (cf. **Hebrews 5:11-14**). Don't beat yourself up for not being as great a teacher as Luke, but don't think you can entirely avoid all teaching just because it isn't your greatest gift.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our teaching and through that teaching motivate and encourage those around us?

1. *Spend time and study with the teachers around you:* Watch what teachers do, how they teach, what they say, why they say it. Let them teach you and help you gain a greater grasp through what they teach you and how they do it. This would include attending classes designed to help folks learn how to teach better.
2. *Read and study your Bible on a regular basis:* The Bible is the basis for what we teach. We can only improve our teaching as we improve our grasp on what God wants us to teach.
3. *Read your Bible with a view to share what you learn with others:* Even if it is only one thing in what you are reading. Always have that as a goal in your reading. What one thing will you share with someone today about what you read and studied?
4. *Be on a constant lookout for life illustrations:* Many lessons come simply from everyday life. Review your day, what you experienced, what you heard, what you saw, and think of biblical principles that were exemplified. Mentally catalogue the illustrations for use in teaching.
5. *Outline what you will say:* When you are going to be doing some teaching, don't fly by the seat of your pants. Prepare and give thought to what you will say, how you will say it, and why you will say it that way. Determine what the major point(s) you want to get across are and then focus your effort on getting those across well.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation? Is yours as a teacher? What will you do about it? When and where will you teach? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your teaching. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** explains, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the teaching with which you are equipped. If you are a teacher, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you teaching? How? When?