

## Christ's gifts to His church Teachers

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

We have reached the final broadcast in our short series 'Christ's gifts to His church', and today we will consider the gift of teachers.

Do you remember a favourite teacher? I can think back to my time at school in what is now referred to as Year 1. My teacher was a certain Mrs Reay. She gave me a great start in my education and infused in me an interest in languages and in mathematics. She made sure that all of her young pupils learned the basics of reading, writing, and speaking well. We all took a lot of interest in the subjects she taught us. We were rarely bored, and we learnt quickly. Beyond teaching us well, why did she have such a good reputation with both pupils and parents? Well, she also lived out a very fine example of a teacher by her character. The children liked her and were obedient to her. We all respected her. And she was very kind to us – but she did not allow that kindness to be abused by disobedience. She famously had eyes in the back of her head, and always seemed to know when a naughty plan was being hatched – so we never strayed too far beyond her boundaries. Her character was a vital part of her success as a teacher – yes, she taught us the objective truths of facts and figures, but she also made them interesting and real to us, so that we were motivated to pursue these interests as we grew up through the school. Even at such a young age a good teacher can play a very important role in the development of someone's character and interests.

Perhaps we can also look back and see examples of bad teaching. A teacher who perhaps did not really understand or seem motivated by their role. Perhaps their character was not so exemplary, and they did not engender loyalty, obedience, or attention. Maybe the content of what they taught was uninteresting or even wrong. Perhaps the result of sitting under certain teachers' direction was that we didn't progress very well at all!

Now it may be all very well to blame our teachers, but we also probably should recognise that we had a responsibility too – a responsibility to work and to apply ourselves to the discipline of learning. The best teacher in the world cannot do anything with someone who refuses to learn! So as we have considered in this series the gifts of apostles and prophets, evangelists and pastors, and now today teachers, I will read from Ephesians 4:11-16 by way of reminder:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love,

may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Here we see the role of all of these gifts of God, namely that we should be equipped for our service, that the body of Christ should be built up, that we should be brought closer together in a united view of the faith and our knowledge of Christ – and that we should be protected from false teachings that would drive us away from the Christian confession and pathway.

So let us consider the Christian teacher’s role and character, the nature of what is taught, and then summarise with some objectives for ourselves, whether we are ‘teacher’ or ‘student’!

### **The Teacher’s Role**

So we move on to this particular gift from Ephesians 4, the gift of teacher. As we read, these gifts are distinct, although when we read ‘pastors and teachers’, we do get a sense of an overlap in the two gifts. Someone with pastoral gift needs to be able to teach the word of God, and conversely a teacher needs to have a sensitivity in understanding his listeners so that the message is delivered at the appropriate level. But let us now consider the teaching gift as distinct from the pastoral gift.

Firstly we learn that it is a gift of primary importance:

“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

The gift of teaching is found immediately after the foundational gifts of apostles and prophets. Paul also emphasises the relative importance of the gift of teaching later in his letter to the Corinthians:

“Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:19).

Paul reprises his reference to teaching ‘others also’ when at the end of his life he writes to Timothy, and in doing so summarises very well the role of the teacher:

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

It is sometimes said that if you want to really test your own mastery of a subject, you should see how well you can explain it to someone else from first principles. Paul takes this one step further – a good Christian teacher must explain the message to someone else so well that they are equally able to pass it on, without diluting that message. So the role of the teacher is to hand on the core doctrines of the Christian faith – ‘the things you have heard from me’, as Paul puts it – not only so your students will learn what you know, but so that they understand it well enough to teach it to others.

### **The Teacher’s Character**

So is the ability to pass it on all that is required? Well, with the earlier example of Mrs Reay, I highlighted that her character was just as important to me as the things that she taught me. So what should the character of a Christian teacher be?

Firstly we can go to the best example of any Christian character we have in the Scripture, the Lord Jesus Himself. What relationship did His followers have with him? Well, a great example of this is to look at the instance of Mary, a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus. After His crucifixion, she finds herself in the garden of his tomb on Easter Day (see John 20). Along with other women she has gone to the tomb to honour Him by anointing His body with spices and perfumes but is astonished to find that the tomb is open and the body is not there. This greatly distresses her, because she is now unable to fulfil her task – not really just a task, but a deep desire to show that love and respect to Him in His death. And suddenly Mary is approached by someone who she takes to be the gardener. The supposed gardener, it transpires, is Jesus Himself! And in that moment of recognition she turns to Him and the first word she says in recognition is, “Rabboni!”, which is to say, Teacher. In that moment of great pressure, the depth of her relationship to Him was expressed in that word, ‘teacher.’ He had taught the way of life to her, and she recognised this in the way that she responded to Him in that moment.

So how did Jesus develop such loyalty from His followers? We see one example in John 13, when Jesus has His disciples around Him in the upstairs room of a private house before He goes to His inevitable crucifixion. After eating the Passover supper together, Jesus does a remarkable thing by taking a towel, putting water into a basin and begins to wash His disciples’ feet then wipe them with the towel. As we read on through John 13, we see that Peter – ever the forthright mouthpiece of the group of disciples – does not understand what his Lord is doing, and protests at the unseemly role reversal that is being played out before him. Nevertheless, Jesus insists on completing the task. He washes the feet of His disciples in turn, and as He sits down again says,

“Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:12-15).

The Lord Jesus shows that despite the influence He clearly had over them as a teacher, He was also one who had come to serve. Such should be the character of a Christian teacher. Teaching is about serving rather than exercising mastery over others. Also, when the disciples argued about greatness between each other, Jesus tells them that,

“The kings and the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves... Yet I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:25-27).

Here the Lord Jesus is clearly the greatest, and yet He is taking the servant’s place. And the servant’s place is also the place for the Christian teacher.

Before we leave the question of the teacher’s character, we must also highlight the warning the Scriptures give to teachers. Paul writes to the Romans, addressing those who were Jewish teachers, and says,

“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?” (Romans 2:21-23).

Paul draws from his earlier Jewish experiences, highlighting that many teachers of the law had taught one thing, but did not hold their own lives up to the same standard. Their lives were a contradiction to what they taught. So he concludes,

“For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written” (Romans 2:24).

This is a challenge to anyone who wishes to take up their gift as a Christian teacher – we must sincerely and soberly ask ourselves whether we are quick to apply the word to others without first applying it to ourselves? There must be no hypocrisy in what we preach, in what we teach, and how we behave. James later puts it in plain terms in his letter:

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

### **What Teachers Teach – Objective Truth**

Mrs Reay taught me facts and figures, language and reading. We might refer to this as ‘objective truth’ – a body of truth which stands independently of what I may think of it. The post-modern paradigm may challenge this idea of objective truths, fixed for all time – and yet even the most convinced post-modernist will not jump out of a plane without a parachute, because they know the certainty of the result! So equally there are objective truths of the Bible relating to the Christian faith, and these must be taught and passed on. Towards the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy saying this:

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

Here we have an indication of the nature of the objective truths of Scripture which must be taught. Paul refers to it as a ‘pattern of sound words.’

Sometimes we may hear the Bible described in relatively limited terms as if it were simply a collection of interesting but very different books, compiled over many centuries and indeed millennia, containing much of interest but without a necessary coherence to the whole. And yes, we can agree it is a book that sometimes contains poetry, sometimes prose, sometimes prophecy, sometimes history, sometimes character study. But it is vital to hold that the Holy Spirit has inspired the Bible throughout, from Genesis to Revelation (2 Timothy 3:16). And as a result, as we read the Bible, a ‘pattern of sound words’ emerges which is neither random nor disjointed. There is a consistent thread of God’s revelation from Genesis in the Old Testament through to Revelation in the New Testament, showing us a seamless narrative of God’s grace, God’s plans, and God’s character.

So what is that ‘pattern of sound words’? We must always be learning and studying the word of God to go deeper into it, though we should not wish to parallel the Egyptian prophets who resisted Moses – Paul rather dismissively compares them to false teachers who were;

“...Always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

Instead we must be always learning, yes, but with a view to increasing towards a ‘knowledge of the truth’ – a goal which is attainable.

So we need to build up our understanding of how the pattern of Scripture holds together. We cannot cover this in detail in this broadcast, though you will find a healthy back catalogue of broadcasts contained on the Truth for Today website at <https://truthfortoday.org.uk/> covering a wide range of Biblical teaching. But to know the pattern of the teaching of Scripture, we need to be able confidently to think through how God works through history – from His eternal purposes which led to His act of special creation, through the significant times of testing of humankind which we read of throughout the Old Testament – along with all the fore-shadowings and prophecies of both a suffering and a victorious a Saviour – to the significance of the cross of Christ.

Do we understand the significance of the cross? How we are saved, and for what purpose? What does the Bible then say to bring together promises regarding Israel, the Gentile nations, and the Church? And what about the future and the end times? Thinking about the Book of Revelation, is it a closed book to us? We should not be discouraged from reading this final book of the Bible with a real purpose of heart to understand it – after all, it is the one book that claims a specific blessing to the reader:

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy” (Revelation 1:3).

Nicodemus had to hear a searching insight from the Lord Jesus –

“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (John 3:10).

May Christian teachers teach from the word of God, from Genesis through to Revelation, with a firm grasp of that ‘pattern of sound words.’

### **Making It Real – The Subjective Side**

One regular complaint about the various things we are taught during schooldays is that we learn too much that has no practical benefit – we learn the facts (perhaps forgetting them too) and then never need them again!

Christian truth needs to be made real to us on the inside, rather than just staying in our heads as a collection of interesting facts. Psalm 119 is a great Bible chapter on God’s word, and we see in this Psalm the love that the writer had for the word of God.

“Oh, how I love Your law!”, the writer exclaims (Psalm 119:97).

And we need to cultivate that love for the truth that is found in God’s word.

Paul similarly had difficulty with the churches in Galatia. He wrote them a very strong letter, going much further in correction than in any other letter in which he dealt with troubles in the churches. He wrote to them,

“I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you” (Galatians 4:20).

Paul was uncertain as to whether the truth really had had that necessary impact in their hearts, beyond some notional assent they may have made. So he refers to them as his

“...Little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19).

Paul would not be satisfied until he could see the formation of Christ in his converts in the churches of Galatia.

So teaching the word of God is not only about a methodical approach to explaining the truth – which is indeed very necessary – but we also must be able to speak the truth into the hearts and minds of those who are listening. We can see the example of this in Paul, as he expresses his gratitude that many in the church at Rome had come out of a very contrary world from lives of sin in which they were enslaved, when he writes to the Romans,

“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Romans 6:17).

Paul did not only seek mere obedience to the truth, but very much emphasised that the heart must be fully engaged.

Consider also the life of King David. David outwardly was a great follower of God. Indeed, God described him as ‘a man after [My] own heart’ (1 Samuel 13:14). David developed into his kingship as he lived on the edge whilst under the daily threat of King Saul pursuing him to destroy him and his supporters. We read in the Psalms his heartfelt cries when he is under such attack, and we finally see his joy when the people of Israel and of Judah come together to acknowledge him as king. Then he expresses his desire to bring the ark of God, that great and holy artefact which had been stolen by the Philistines, back to its rightful place in Jerusalem. We see David in his great joy and enthusiasm whirling and leaping as the ark is brought into Jerusalem. Yes, David was a man who outwardly and even in his inward expressions was a follower of the Lord. And yet there was something missing. The reality of God had not been formed in every aspect of his life, and so we read later of his great sin with Bathsheba, his complicity in the crime of murdering Bathsheba’s husband and the conspiracy to cover it up. And so David cries out, as we can, in Psalm 51 – a Psalm of great and deep heartfelt repentance after this incident –

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:1-2).

He acknowledges the deep necessity of inner renewal,

“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Psalm 51:6).

We may understand and be able to explain all the truth in the world, but it must have an inward reality inside.

So, as God's objective truth enters our hearts, we should begin to appreciate, love, and follow the truth too. This is the ‘subjective’ side of the truth – making it real in our hearts – and this is just as important a task for the Christian teacher. The objective truths of the word must be taught, but they must also lead to change in lives. The Christian teacher’s goal must also be that Christ is formed in us.

### **In Review**

Today we have had a whistle-stop review of the role and character of the Christian teacher, along with the objective and subjective side of the truth that is to be taught. But my final word in this broadcast to teachers is to consider the instruction God gave to Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch, after he had been greatly used in recording and transmitting God’s word through Jeremiah:

“And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them”  
(Jeremiah 45:5).

The Christian testimony through time has had its share of gifted teachers who have fallen by the wayside through the pride that comes by the misuse of spiritual gifts – as Paul amply warns in 1 Corinthians. And as the Lord Jesus said,

“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:8-12).

If you have been given the gift of teacher, I would urge you – don’t seek the title, just do the work.

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:10).

Lastly, whether we exercise that gift of teaching or not, we will all at some point be on the ‘receiving end’ of teaching – so what should my attitude be to that teaching?

Firstly, we should not be critical in the commonly used negative sense of the word. Being critical can become a manner and way of life. Nevertheless, in the case of the New Testament prophets – who arguably were of higher rank than teachers – the Corinthians were still exhorted to,

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge” (1 Corinthians 14:29).

There must always be a careful evaluation of what we hear. We should take to heart the example of the Bereans, who were described as being ‘more fair-minded’ than their near neighbours, in that they

“...Received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

But after hearing the word of God with readiness, there needs to be a respectful submission – not to the teacher as such, but to the word of God that he is teaching. So we should challenge ourselves: are we helping those that God has gifted to be our teachers, by being teachable? James exhorts us to be ‘willing to yield’, or as the KJV states, ‘easy to be entreated’ (James 3:17). Is this my character? So we should allow the Holy Spirit to do His work:

“But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:27).

"Thank you or listening to this Truth for Today talk on "Teachers", talk number T1370 in the series, "Christ's gifts to His Church."

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