

LESSON TWO

What is Teaching

Cecil May, Dean of the V. P. Black School of Bible at Faulkner University

wrote:

An old saw says, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.” Then someone asked, “What about those who can’t teach?” The answer given was, “They teach teachers.

As a longtime teacher of preachers, I reject that characterization.

An altogether different view is reflected in this quotation:

Years ago, after a celebrated international career on the stage, the world-famous violinist Jascha Heifetz became a Professor of Music at UCLA. When someone asked him why he had left the glamour of performing to become a teacher, Heifetz answered, ‘Violin playing is a perishable art. It must be passed on; otherwise it is lost.’

Then he went on to say,

‘I remember my old violin professor in Russia. He said if I worked hard enough, someday I would be good enough to teach.’

Preaching and Bible teaching are also “perishable arts.” That is not to say no one can learn them primarily on their own; some obviously have. But there are those who do them well, those who do them better, and those who do them superbly. All of us can learn from each other, and those with the greatest knowledge and skills are the best from whom to learn. Better yet if they have successful ministry experience behind them!

In Christ’s kingdom it is the local church, led by its elders and preachers, where the work of Christ is primarily done. To be able to teach preachers is a wonderful place of service, a valuable talent and a useful skill. We who do that are blessed beyond measure to have that privilege. But our work has value

only to the extent that the students we teach perform their work well in local churches in their respective communities.

Two tasks of the teachers or preachers are to ensure they know the Word and they have the ability to continue to grow in knowledge and the practice of righteousness.

‘I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth’ (3 John 1:4).

How is “teaching” defined? Our English word derives from the Old English *tācan*, and is related to Old Saxon *tēkan*, which meant “to show how to do.” “Teach” in the New Testament is the translation of “*διδάσκω*.” Thayer defines it as “*to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses.*” Louw & Nida define it as “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting — ‘to teach, teaching.’” “Teach” and its variants are important words in the New Testament as shown in this table:

WORD	NUMBER OF TIMES USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
teach	105
teacher	57
teachers	13
teaches	13
teaching	89
teachings	3

In the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as a teacher more than by any other title. Teaching was more common than preaching in the early church. While John the Baptist was a preacher, Christ was a

teacher. Sixty out of ninety times that Jesus was addressed, He was called “teacher.” And He commissioned His followers to teach as well as to preach (Matt. 28:19–20). While the words for “preaching” are found about 150 times in Scripture, those for “teaching” are mentioned about 250 times. The early church saw the vital importance of continually teaching its members from the Word of God. The Greek word most often given to Christ, as an educational title, is *didaskalos*. This word is translated “teacher” or “master” and is found more than forty times in the Gospels. Most frequently in the King James Version of the Bible, *didaskalos* is translated “master” rather than “teacher” because at the time of translation the word *master* was understood to mean “schoolmaster.”

- Jesus’ disciples referred to Him as teacher or master (Mark 4:38).
- The scribes and Pharisees referred to Him in this way (John 3:2).
- Jesus identified Himself by the term (Mark 14:14).

Other Bible passages also point out the priority of teaching in the ministry of Christ (Matt. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29).

Rabbi is another title associated with the word *teacher* and is used to refer to Christ. This word is also sometimes translated “master” and, as a Jewish title, designated one as able to teach with the authority of

Moses, possessing authority to interpret the law. Nicodemus and the disciples of John the Baptist called Jesus “Rabbi” (John 1:38; 3:2).

Rabboni (John 20:16), a similar but even more intensively educational and relational title, was used by Mary Magdalene when He appeared to her after the Resurrection.