

Paradigm Shift
in
Teaching
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Rethinking our Teaching

Teaching was an important activity of life throughout the Bible. If one makes a study of teaching in the Bible they easily discover that teaching was for living—it was to help the people know how they were to live. When the people heard the teaching, they were expected to go and live according to what they heard. However, there are many examples in the Bible of teaching not resulting in changed living. People—hearers of the Word—still did not live according to the God’s instructions.

Moses Teaches the Law

The first major set of instructions God gave for people, He gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Look at Exodus 19. Moses starts out introducing the people to the fact that God is telling them what to do and that He wants them to obey. In verse 8 the people all responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said”. The following chapters record the instructions that Moses gave the people and again they declared, “Everything the Lord has said we will do...we will obey” (Ex. 24:3, 7). At the time of hearing, their hearts were touched and they were willing to obey. How wonderful if the story ended there with them agreeing to obey. But history lets us know that is not what happened. Moses, the teacher, leaves them to practice what they have been taught. He goes up on the mountain and is gone for forty days.

When you read chapter 32 you begin to realize that the teachings obviously resided in the teacher and never truly transferred to the lives of the people. Therefore, when the teacher did not return quickly, the teachings faded and the people returned to their traditional way of living and worship. They built an idol, a golden calf, to worship. They could not keep their promise of obedience for even forty days.

Does this happen where we are today? Do you see people who hear the Word and are excited about what they hear? They declare they will obey, but later they allow

the issues of reality to overtake the words they heard and they forget the promises they made. Is it possible to teach in a way that will lead to living out the teachings and not just hearing them?

The Priest Teaches

Another example of teaching is found in 2 Kings 17. The Assyrians have captured Samaria, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and have taken the people into captivity. However, the Assyrians did not want to leave the area without residents and so they moved others into Samaria. It was an international community. People from five different locations were brought in (see 2 Kings 17:24). Each one came in with their own set of beliefs and worship practices. But, even though God had allowed the Israelites to be captured and taken into captivity, Samaria still belonged to God and one day His people would return. A problem broke out among the new residents. The residents did not know how to worship God and God sent lions among them and killed some of them (2 Kings 17:25). Interestingly, when this was reported to the king, he knew what to do. He told them to send for a priest from among the Israelites to go back to Samaria to teach the people (2 Kings 17:27). A priest went and taught the people who were not Israelites but were now living in the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 17:28). Now, what happens if we compare verse 28 with verses 29, 32, 40, and 41?

The big question then comes, why did that happen? If they were taught, why did they not obey? Let's look at the situation. First of all, look at the teacher. What kind of teacher was he? Did he know what he was talking about? Did he teach the truth? In the Old Testament, the priests were the keepers of the law. They knew what the law said and they were responsible to teach it to the people. The Scripture gives us no reason to believe that the priest was anything other than a good priest, so we must accept the fact that he was an expert of the law and knew the content of what he was teaching. Then we look at the people. Did they hear the teaching? Did they receive it? Were they able to obey it? Looking at verses 32, 33, and 41 indicate that yes, the people did hear and obeyed. They did what they were taught to do—they worshipped the Lord. What then was the problem? They also worshipped other gods. They practiced syncretism. They mixed the truth of God with their own traditions. Why? Because their teaching was not complete. How did this happen? To answer this question, we have to go back to the teacher. The teacher was the expert in the law. He taught them the content but he did not help them to look at their own lives and determine what they should do.

Actions Learners need to Perform

Content is not enough. Being an expert in the subject being taught is not enough. Teachers must be trained to help the learners move from the words they hear to living it out in their lives. There are five actions a teacher needs to

help the student perform in the classroom to move from hearing the words of the teacher to making decisions and living out the teachings. These five actions are: receive, explore, reflect, decide, and evaluate.

Receive: Action without truth is dangerous as Paul mentioned in Romans 10:2–3. And truth without action is wasted. Learners need to receive the content. They need to know the foundational information before they can know how to move forward. So, the priest did well, he gave them the truth; he taught them the law.

Explore: Hearing the truth without understanding it makes it almost impossible to obey. Ezra and the Levites recognized the importance of understanding as they not only read the law to the people but explained it so that it could be understood (Neh. 8:8). Teachers need to help the learners explore the meaning of the information they receive so that they understand it. This seems to be where many teachers, like the priest in Second Kings, stop. They deliver the content and they give explanations and meanings and then they stop believing their work is finished. They assume that because the learner heard and understood the content, they will know what to do and do it. But, the teaching task is not finished yet because that assumption is not true. There is more.

Reflect: After helping the learner to receive the content and to explore the meaning of the content, teachers must continue to guide the learner to reflect on how the information is relevant to their lives. This requires teachers to know their learners. It is not the responsibility of the teacher to tell the learner what to do, but rather to give them opportunity to reflect on what is being taught. How does it relate to their lives? Think about the problem in Second Kings. What if the priest had led the people to reflect on the problem helping them to understand what the teaching would mean and how it was relevant to their needs? Delivering the content and leaving the learners alone is leaving the task of teaching incomplete.

Decide: Once the learners have reflected on the meaning of the teaching for their lives, they must then consciously decide what to do about it. Again, think about the priest in Samaria, what if he had taken the time to guide the learners to reflect and determine what they should do about the teaching? What if he had helped them to look at the problem—being killed by lions because they did not know how to worship the Lord—and guided them through reflecting on the truth of how to worship the Lord until they reached the decision of what to do? In working through these actions the teacher can identify areas of misunderstanding and guide the learners to overcome them. The priest teacher should have spent time with the learners in discussion and reflection until he determined that the learners were well equipped to obey the content correctly. This leads us to the

last action.

Evaluate: After the learners decide on the action they should take, the teacher helps them to evaluate that decision to determine if their action is true to the content and meaning of what was taught. The priest teacher knew that the problem was that the people did not know how to worship the Lord. He knew they worshipped other gods. If he had discussed with them their decision to worship the Lord but continue with their traditional worship as well, he could have helped them in the evaluation to realize that was not an appropriate action to take.

God does not call teachers to deliver content even content with meaning. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that God gave the church the various ministers—which included teachers—to equipping the church for service and for living a spiritually mature life (Eph. 4:11–15). Teachers, who end their task after delivering the content and its meaning, stop short of the responsibility of teaching. They are not really teachers but are only proclaimers—someone who tells instead of teaches.

May God by His Holy Spirit help us as teachers to complete the task. May He help us to not stop short but finish the task, persevering until the learners are equipped for living.

