

TEACHING SHOULD BE ONLY FOR THE GOD-FEARING

Today's Text: 2 Peter 2

Extracts:

.... there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries... These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever... While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage [2 Pet. 2: 1-3,9-10, 17,19]

There is the story of an army officer whose duty was to groom the elite corps of young officers to guard the French king. The corps members were drawn from other European countries, mainly Germany. Part of their training was to first learn French so that they could understand instructions. Over time, the officer observed that the king asked the same questions in the same order. So, rather than teach the whole French language, he taught new recruits the answers to the popular questions, as follows:

“How old are you?”- Answer: 20 years
“When did you join my service? - 6 months ago
“Are you happy or contented? - Both

One day, the young king unexpectedly stumbled on the training session of the next batch. He drew out one of them and started chatting with him as follows:

“Young man, I haven't seen you before; when did you join my service? -
He answered, “20 years”
How old are you? -6 months ago
Are you crazy or I am? -Both

The lesson we learn from that story is that to be a good teacher takes much more than teaching skills. In today's study, Apostle Peter draws our attention to the challenges that teachers of the word face and how to overcome them.

1. Background: Teaching is a spiritual mission

During His earthly ministry, Jesus was said to go about all the cities and villages, “**teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” [Matt. 9: 35]. He also gave spiritual gifts to His followers- some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and **some teachers**. The purpose is to equip the saints “for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” [Eph. 4: 11-12].

From the foregoing, it follows that there is a difference between teaching and preaching. According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, to preach is to deliver a sermon. To teach is to cause to gain knowledge or skill. You need spiritual gifts to do both fruitfully. For example, after Jesus had finished the Sermon on the Mount, “the people were astonished at His teaching, for **He taught them as one having authority**, and not as the scribes” [Matt. 7: 28-29].

Parents, instructors and church leaders are teachers that we are familiar with, but are they all really teachers? Are they all good teachers? Are they all God-fearing? With specific reference to the house of God, is teaching only for ministers/pastors? Most times, when we listen to what is coming at us from the pulpit, we cannot differentiate between preaching and teaching, between personal opinion and the word of God. Are they the same? Apostle Peter’s writing [2 Peter 2] will enable us to answer such questions in today’s study.

Peter pointed out that it is not all teachers that are God-fearing. He drew our attention to the following tendencies among some teachers in our places of worship:

1) *Some teach destructive doctrines*

There are false teachers who secretly bring in “destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” Since many of their listeners/followers fall for their destructive ways, innocent people are misled and the way of truth is blasphemed [vv.1-3]. Their popular themes emphasize instant material prosperity instead of salvation.

2) *False teachers face doom*

False teachers walk according to the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed and not afraid to speak ill of dignitaries. However, the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations [vv. 9-10]. Therefore, they may not always be able to mislead their students/listeners.

3) *Many false teachers are depraved*

False teachers speak evil of things they do not understand, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin. They have a heart trained in covetous practices and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray [**vv.12-17**].

4) *Many false teachers practise deception*

While promising followers liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage [**vv.18-22**]. Thus, many false teachers practise deception.

From the foregoing, we see that it takes more than speaking skills and higher education to be a faithful teacher. Peter used two proverbs to sum up the unrighteousness of false teachers: a dog returns to its vomit, and a sow (pig) having washed to its wallowing in the mire [**v. 22**]. By their fruits, we shall know them.

2. Lessons for us

The following lessons should be noted:

1) *Know who your teacher is following*

Many teachers are imitating their mentors who may not be Jesus Christ. In many congregations, such mentors are the church leaders. They put emphasis on loyalty, materialism and such-like matters. Integrity and fear of God are ignored or deemphasized. Therefore, you must know your teacher, the one you are following.

H(sh)e must be God-fearing and demonstrate loyalty to God and His Christ. For example, in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, he wrote, "I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost...and ***if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do***" [**1 Cor. 16: 8-10**].

2) *Teaching is not only for ministers or elders*

Most teachers in our congregations tend to be the ministers and pastors. However, as we saw earlier, teaching is a spiritual gift, different from the gift of preaching. Therefore, God can raise up any member as a great teacher. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" [**1 Cor. 3: 6-7**].

That suggests mutual respect for every member's spiritual talents-all to be used for God's glory. Nevertheless, teaching, like every spiritual gift should be encouraged among the God-fearing members for the best results.

3) *Satan is most active within the church*

Satan is most active where people gather to do God's work. That is because targets to lure into temptation are easily found there. For example, Jesus was once teaching on the Sabbaths in Capernaum, a city of Galilee. There in the synagogue was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon. He cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are- the Holy One of God!" [Lk 4: 31-34]. Can you imagine if that congregation did not have Jesus Christ? Therefore, our teachers must be in Spirit so that satanic forces cannot pollute our worship.

4) *Test the Spirit*

The word of God says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" [1 Jn 4: 1-2]. Many "great" but false teachers will come your way. Unless you test the spirit they are using, you could be misled! To test the spirit means you yourself must be in Spirit so that only the truth of God can penetrate you.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that teaching should only be for the God-fearing, irrespective of their church rank.

3. **Conclusion: Christ is your best Teacher!**

Jesus has said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" [Jn 5:19]. It follows that whatever He teaches us comes from His Father. Whoever wants to be a successful teacher should look up to Jesus. Just as whatever Jesus teaches comes from His Father, whatever the faithful teacher teaches should come from Jesus.

Therefore, Christ is your best Teacher.