

Teaching with Integrity

Teaching God's truth is an awesome responsibility. But no matter how accurately we try to teach it, we are wasting our time if we are not living what we teach.

“In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Tit. 2:7-8).



How does God get His message of salvation out to a lost humanity? By *teaching* (Ac. 5:42; 18:11; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 4:2; etc.). But *how* that message is taught makes all the difference in its effectiveness.

The word in v. 7 translated “integrity,” found only here in the New Testament, is the negative form of a root word meaning “corruption” or “decay” (e.g., the body of Jesus did not see “corruption,” Ac. 2:27, 31; 13:34-37). Titus’ teaching was to be the antithesis of corruption. As it is used here, the word is describing not *what* Titus taught, but *how* he taught it. Thus, “in your teaching, you must show integrity” (NEB). Expressed another way, those who listened to Titus’ teaching had to see integrity in their teacher; otherwise, his message would be discredited.

Throughout the ages, the Lord’s cause has suffered great harm at the hands of frauds whose character did not line up with their teaching. Some men use their role as teachers to establish a reputation among their peers as spiritual heavyweights (like the scribes

and Pharisees, Matt. 6:1-18; Matt. 23). Others use teaching as a competition, trying to out-perform their rivals—and are green with envy when they fall short (see Paul’s critics in Phil. 1:15-17). For others, teaching is little more than a lucrative profession; the golden tongues get the premium paychecks, and their preaching is tailored so as not to threaten the gravy train (1 Thess. 2:5; 2 Tim. 4:3). Then there are those for whom teaching is one big power trip—they are the experts and will make sure no one steps outside the lines they have drawn (e.g., the false apostles in Corinth, who “struck the face” of their audience, 2 Cor. 11:20).

The corrupt character of these teachers often taints the content of their teaching. Their message is just as toxic and dangerous as they are. But there are exceptions to that rule. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, “whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do” (Matt. 23:3). They had the right message but did a lousy job of living it in their own lives. Likewise, those teachers who out of envy and strife sought to discredit Paul, were at least preaching Christ, and Paul was okay with that (Phil. 1:16-18). But few listeners have the discernment to appreciate the value of a good message coming from a bad messenger.

Teaching with integrity requires a lot of serious soul-searching on the part of the teacher. Why am I doing this? For whose benefit am I doing it? What is my attitude toward those I am teaching? Am I living up to the ideals I am calling others to embrace? Can I accept rejection without becoming bitter toward my detractors? Until we have carefully sorted through all these questions and evaluated our deepest motives, we are not ready to teach others.

One more detail: If you think this article doesn’t apply to you because you are not a preacher or elder or Bible class teacher, think again. *Parents* are to teach their children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:7); *all of us* are to admonish and exhort each other as we have opportunity (Heb. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:14; Gal. 6:1); *every Christian* is to be ready to “give a defense” to outsiders who question our faith (1 Pet. 3:15). In all these relationships, the same principle still applies: how others receive the message we share with them will be heavily influenced by our integrity—or lack thereof. The world has seen enough of hypocritical Christianity. Let us show with our lives the value of what we are teaching.

— David King