

# THE ART OF TEACHING

*Twelve Things Teachers Must Not Do*  
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Teaching good Bible classes in the local church is certainly one of the great challenges we have in serving the Lord. Bible classes are vital to the growth and edification of the church and yet most churches do not have the luxury of a staff of trained teachers to handle the job. Teachers must be recruited from willing members who can be overwhelmed with the job of teaching an interesting class (a job that many trained college professors fail). This often results in classes that are boring and frustrating. In many cases classes can be improved measurably simply by avoiding some common mistakes. Here is a list of things that teachers generally must *avoid* if they are going to teach an edifying and stimulating class.

1. **Begin the class by talking too much.** A teacher must get immediate involvement so that the class gets on its "toes" and is ready to participate. Too much talking by the teacher at any time during the class, but especially at the beginning, causes students to gear themselves for listening instead of participating. It will be hard to generate discussion if you start with too much personal input. Look into the eyes of the members of your class next time you teach. After only one minute of you talking at the beginning of the class you will notice a change in attentiveness and the longer you continue with your monologue the less attentive and excited about the class your students will be.

2. **Ask questions that have answers that are too obvious.** The result will be that no one will answer or at the least they will feel embarrassed to answer such an obvious question. When this happens, some teachers will even think that they are teaching a really dumb class. But no adult likes to sit in or participate in a class that is run like kindergarten. An exception to this rule is the first question of the class period in which you are trying to get immediate involvement. Your first question should be fairly easy, though still not overly obvious. For example, "*What is the theme of the book we are studying? What was the main point of the last chapter we studied?*"

3. **Lecture.** Remember school? How much did you like a teacher who lectured? The enjoyment of learning is *self-discovery*. Lecture defeats self-discovery. Find ways to *lead* the class to see what God says. Teachers often have a strong urge to tell the class all they know instead of leading the class to see God's truths for themselves. Consider some basic rules concerning lecture:

- (a) Lecture implies that no one else in the class has any valuable input. You, the teacher, must know all there is to know about the subject.
- (b) Lecture misses the reason for our classes, that of mutual edification (Eph.4:16) and a joint search for truth (Eph.4:12-13).
- (c) Lecture is a poor way of learning. We remember only about 5% of what we hear; 10% of what we read; 30% of what we see; 50% of what we hear and see; 70% of what we say; 90% of what we say and do. Therefore getting a class to actually speak the truths (Eph.4:15) they are learning, will create a better learning atmosphere.

- (d) Lecture will make students see no need of preparation for a class and therefore discourages personal study and even class attendance.

4. **“Shoot down” wrong answers**, especially answers that are technically correct, but not answers that you were looking for. A teacher must be very careful how he handles a student who gives a different answer than what he is looking for. Sometimes a teacher has asked a very broad question but is looking for a very narrow answer. He then shoots down every answer, no matter how correct, because they are not the specific answer he was looking for. If you want a specific answer, you must ask your question so that it gives students a legitimate opportunity to figure out what you are looking for. There are at least two ways of correcting a wrong answer that is appropriate:

- (a) In order to better understand a person’s answer that you perceive to be wrong (remember, the answer may not be wrong, it may just for the moment appear to be wrong), you might ask *why* they believe their answer to be correct. For example: *“I had never thought of that answer; why do you think that? Is there some scripture that would give you that idea?”*
- (b) If you are pretty sure the answer is wrong you could say, *“Well, I’m not sure that would be correct because of (scripture) that teaches...”*

Teachers must realize that they hold the key to good class discussion. By being harsh or abrupt with a class member who gives a wrong answer you effectively kill class participation.

5. **Teach based on previous knowledge.** When a teacher does little if any preparation because he thinks he already knows the subject or text, it is like serving a cold can of beans. Relying on past knowledge makes a teacher dull and boring. Whether teacher or student, when we do not restudy a text before our class we are taking an arrogant attitude. Do we really know the text so well that there is nothing more to learn? Do we have perfect recall of everything we learned in the past? Are we that sure that our past positions on a given text were perfect, without flaw? Good preparation and study makes a teacher fresh and interesting.

6. **Study or teach the text verse by verse.** Many teachers are not leading their class in a *textual* study but in a *topical* study. Instead of trying to understand the Holy Spirit’s message in the text, these classes are allowing each verse to suggest to them a new topic to discuss. If the verse mentions Satan, the teacher follows cross references all over the Bible on Satan. If the verse mentions the gospel, a study of the “gospel” is done. Classes like this will spend an extraordinary amount of time covering one book and at the end know very little about the book they just studied. Instead, study a paragraph always looking for the main point and the progression of thought used by the author. Always get the skyscraper view of a text before looking at the details. Delay topical studies for other classes.

7. **Be bored with the text.** It is important for a teacher to exhibit enthusiasm about what he is teaching. A teacher’s enthusiasm is transferred to the student. If you are not excited about a text, you simply haven’t studied it enough. Not a thing God wrote is boring when properly understood.

8. **Allow students to divert the class to topics outside the scope of the class.** Good teachers have a design for their class and for what they want to accomplish in each class period. If a teacher

continually allows a student to dictate the direction of the discussion, the learning experience will lack organization and structure. The result will be that members become frustrated with the undisciplined way the class is run. Some teachers will allow class members to voice all their "I think so's" without centering their attention on the text or insisting that class members back up their comments with scripture. Classes like this never have a feeling of accomplishment. The class becomes more of a gab session than an edifying experience.

**9. Move too slow or too fast through the material.** These extremes are often a symptom of a lack of study and preparation. The teacher who moves too slowly through the material tries to get as much class discussion as possible, no matter how redundant, so that he has to do the least amount of preparation. Students stop preparing because they know that the class will not move beyond a few verses anyway. The teacher who moves too fast may not be studying enough to see the depth in the text under consideration. He quickly moves through each chapter accepting only superficial explanations of the text. The result of both too slow and too fast teachers are class members who become discouraged with the learning process and want to quit.

**10. Avoid correcting statements that are not true.** Many teachers act simply as discussion monitors. When statements are made that are false, they nod their heads and go to the next comment. When that comment is the opposite of the one given previously, they again nod their heads and go on. It is not long before class members are saying, *"Is there some conclusion to this?"* While a teacher should not commit himself to a position unless he is sure, he can at least summarize the points made in the class and then admit that he will need more study before stating his own belief. However, a teacher's goal should be to anticipate differing opinions so that he can research the subject thoroughly and better direct the class discussion. It is important for teachers to summarize the main points made in class and bring those points to a conclusion before moving on. By doing this, students will feel a sense of accomplishment.

**11. Answer your own questions.** As soon as a class learns that a teacher will answer his own questions, they will sit quietly and wait for his answer. Just as Jesus often did, good teachers are willing to ask a question and then wait. Don't be afraid of the silence. Allow that it takes people time to think and formulate an answer before speaking. Be sensitive to the possibility that you did not state the question clearly and therefore need to repeat the question in different words. If the class still does not have an answer, point them in a direction that will allow them to find the answer. Never tell a class what a text means and then ask for comments. Why should they comment? You have already told the answer! Always encourage self-discovery, it is what makes learning enjoyable.

**12. Teach the class the exact same way every time.** Good sermons have regular intervals where the preacher "shifts gears" or changes his pace. He may use an illustration, a rhetorical question, a dramatic pause, or even a change in voice inflection to help his audience stay focused. Good teachers also must shift gears. A teacher can play "devil's advocate" on a key issue or present two opposite positions and ask the class to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each position. When studying the Old Testament, a great change of pace is to do an oral review where you begin to tell the Old Testament story while challenging the class to fill in names, places, and key events in the story. Our goal as teachers is to create an atmosphere where the members of our class eagerly look forward to the class time.