

A Challenge to Teachers and Preachers from Dr. George Patterson!

DO WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHES ABOUT TEACHING: IT COULD SURPRISE YOU

Dr. George Patterson recalls, "My church's senior pastor resigned and the Board asked me to advise the Pulpit Committee on how to select a replacement. I plead, *"We need a pastor who is a shepherd and not just a preacher. If you do not know the difference, then you should resign from this committee."* My plea was futile; they called a skilled expository preacher who attracted older believers from other churches but lost younger members, and the church went into decline.

What is wrong with the above scenario, which is repeating itself in churches all over America? Compare it with the action-oriented application of the word so evident in 1 Thessalonians 1.5-6:

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

To discover how to teach the Bible *biblically*, examine these New Testament requirements for teaching.

- **Link learning immediately and directly to duty.**

In the New Testament, teaching normally includes imperative commands; it almost always refers to instructing others in what to do and in how to do it. Biblical teaching is nearer in meaning to the American word, *training*, that is, equipping others for what they are to do. E.g., "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11.1).

In contrast, most English speakers teach to inform, explain, or guide others through a course of learning. When one simply imparts to others what he wants them to know, action gets eclipsed by abstraction.

- **Maintain interaction with learners.**

New Testament teaching was nearly always done through dialogue, "teaching one another" (Col. 3.16), exchanging thoughts, replying to queries, laying plans for group action, with a view to empowering others to fulfill their gift-based ministries. Some churches break a large congregation into tiny groups for several minutes during worship, in order to carry out this required New Testament interactive teaching. Other churches form cell groups that are satellite churches, or they purposely stay tiny by multiplying daughter churches.

In contrast, modern pastors and teachers often teach lessons and preach sermons to passive listeners, as though hearers were ignorant and unable to learn from the bible or from each other.

- **Appreciate learners' intelligence, and expect an active response.**

New Testament teachers fully expected learners to respond actively and capably at once in the Holy Spirit's power. The New Testament assures churches that God gives them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to churches, in order that these five kinds of minister train others in the body "to equip the saints for the work of ministry."

In contrast, many American pastors take for granted that their own spiritual gift and main task are to declare truth, to explain theology and to expound on the background and meaning of bible passages.

- **Vary your teaching style to fit immediate needs.**

The New Testament displays a healthy variety of teaching methods, including Jesus' parables and pointed questions, Paul's rousing challenges and fruitful "dialogue" in Tyrannus' school, Philip's unrehearsed clarifying of Isaiah 53 for the Ethiopian official, and Stephen's historical panorama of sacred events.

By contrast, many pastors and teachers insist on one form of rhetoric for all occasions, regardless of its aptness.

Patterson recalls his first sermon in a primitive village. He had labored long over word studies and an expository outline, heeding strictly what homiletics professors had declared to be God's one true way to preach. When he stood behind the rickety little table that had been set up for a pulpit, the Holy Spirit's sword struck, convincing him that what he had prepared was sorrowfully irrelevant. So he sat down and asked the tiny group to pull their chairs around in a circle. Then he said, "Let's talk about what you're going to do for Christ during the next few weeks." Changed lives, new churches and much learning of Scripture resulted from that chat, including the obedience-oriented pastoral training materials titled *Train And Multiply*, now used by thousands in many languages.

- **Expedite many others' use of their different spiritual gifts.**

The New Testament is saturated with its "one another" commands and others that demand reciprocal, interaction within the Body. All believers are to exercise their God-given gifts actively, including during worship. Equipping them to do so remains the essential purpose of Spirit-filled teaching (Eph. 4.11-16).

By contrast, those who mainly emphasis pastoral preaching and teaching often eclipse other gift-based ministries.

Thus, most believers who attend pulpit-oriented churches fail to develop their own gifts, and few find suitable ministry opportunities. They either become passive listeners or they cease attending church. Seminaries and bible schools unwittingly perpetuate this abuse of the teaching gift by an unbalanced emphasis on bible doctrine, specific exegetical methods, excessively abstract systematic theology and exclusive use of expository preaching. As a result, church boards know no better than to choose a pastor on the basis of a candidate's formal theological qualifications and demonstrated ability to deliver monologue sermons.

If this exposé has left you uneasy, then you might welcome a painless remedy that does not try to change the teaching and learning habits of everyone in your church. The tradition is too deeply entrenched to expect an average pastor or layman to do otherwise.

A suitable remedy is simply to let the few who desire to teach and learn in the New Testament way, form a "second track" of simple churches or cellular communities. These retain the doctrine and historical identity of their mother church and remain in loving, respectful fellowship with it, but they remain free to require only what Jesus and His apostles required in their new communities.

The New Testament-based teaching rules cited above have been proven effective in many huge movements overseas, and, recently, in North America. For information or counsel (no fees), contact *People Of Yes!* at www.peopleofyes.com. We will put you in touch with an advocate of churches that appoint pastors or elders for their demonstrated ability to win the lost, to make obedient disciples of new believers, to train up new leaders and to multiply cells and congregations. Only such fruitful workers are "able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2.2).

Do you agree? Let me know. Write to me at www.yesnet.pw