

Teaching a Good Bible Class

Jas. 3:1

Introduction:

1. James 3:1 place heavy accountability on Bible teachers: “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

- A. When I read this verse, I think of the principle of **stewardship** – *that I’m delivering a message I did not originate ... and that gives me great pause, when I consider my accountability to the Divine Originator.*
- B. The student, the listener has responsibility to listen with care, with discernment, with intention to change and to obey; to learn to use their Bible ... all of that.
- C. The teacher has all that – **but in addition**, this greater strictness – this accountability to God, who revealed from His perfect mind the content we are presenting.
- D. With few exceptions – every local preacher will have Bible class responsibility.
- E. We want to help you do that well.

2. Very simply, we'll call this session – **HOW TO TEACH A GOOD BIBLE CLASS**. I'll present what I have for about 30 minutes, and then you'll have opportunity to discuss this for another 30 minutes. *We want to help each other teach better Bible classes.*

Body:

I. First, let's consider what constitutes a good Bible class - - I'll not need to spend a lot of time here, but let's do **some elimination**.

A. **A good Bible class cannot be measured just by attendance or body count.**

1. I trust we are clear on this.
2. You can fill a room or auditorium, standing room only.
3. That's great.
4. But what's important is – what is being taught – and how is it being received and used in life by the people – regardless of the size of the class.

B. **Discussion, lively discussion, everybody talking – is not the measure of a good Bible class.**

1. **What** is being discussed?
How is it being discussed?
2. Is there clarity; is it helpful?
3. Is there disciplined moderation and order?
4. It takes more than just people talking to make a good Bible class.
5. Listening to God is the priority – not just listening to ourselves.

C. A good Bible class requires more than just accuracy of teaching.

1. You can teach a class that is completely absent of any error – but it not be an altogether effective class.
2. A robot or tape recorder can dispense truth.
3. Something else needs to accompany that – and I'll bring that up in a few minutes.

D. Compliments and Praise do not insure a good Bible class.

1. Someone may compliment your Bible class – **because** you left something out they didn't want to hear.
2. Human praise doesn't mean you've been faithful to your stewardship to God.

E. I recommend the teacher engage in **Internal Evaluation**, yet just the fact you gave yourself an "A+" does not insure success.

1. If you give yourself an "F" or "D," that is not an absolute conclusion of failure.
2. Our internal evaluations can be flawed – one way or the other because of our imperfection.
3. Personal Evaluations are imperfect measuring systems – not able to yield perfectly objective results.

II. The point of having a Bible class is – for **THE WORD OF GOD TO BE CONNECTED TO THE REAL LIVES OF PEOPLE.**

- A. That means, you will never have a complete success or some sort of perfect "sales report."
Because of the nature of what we do with that element of free choice.

- B. Students in classes may or may not **want** the Word of God to be connected to their lives.
- C. The perfect Bible class would mean – every single person listened attentively and with intention to apply the Word – and followed up consistently until death.
- D. You may teach Bible classes for almost 50 years and never really have that kind of assurance of perfect achievement with every student every time.
- E. **But, it has to be your purpose** – the point of what you are doing is – for **The Word of God to be connected to the lives of the people.**
- F. So, no matter if there are 15 in your class, or 250 – your focus must be on HOW TO TEACH A GOOD BIBLE CLASS, **where the Word of God is connected to the lives of the people. They understand it; you make them think about it – and you motivate them to use it.**
- G. Some will partake and be nourished; others will not have sufficient appetite to be fed – **but your job is to set a good table and offer healthy food God has provided.**

III. With that in mind – let's break this down into specifics:

A. Suitable Material.

1. This requires good judgment, the oversight of elders, input from students –
2. Well-thought out decisions about the plan that answers the need – *from God's word to the minds and lives of the people.*
3. Good choices about text or topic or workbook.
4. In many cases – over time, it becomes the routine that just one man makes all these choices – THE LOCAL PREACHER.
5. That would be fine if the local preacher were the only smart person in the group.
6. But the way that often turns out is – the **preacher teaches what he enjoys teaching, and what he is comfortable with.**
 - a. Like, if you cook – you are likely to cook what you like ... and what you think you are good at.

- b. If you teach two Bible classes a week, it is most likely – you’ll be tempted to teach what you like to teach.
7. **That may not be the same** as what people need – or what elders see the people need.
8. Elders need their hands on this process, and input from members and students should not be discounted.
9. Suitable Material --- *from God’s Word to the minds and lives of the people.*
10. I can’t be more specific than that --- because local situation is the key factor.

B. Coverage of that material in the time allotted.

1. Just here – I’m including two issues:
 - a. ONE – how many classes contain one theme, book or subject.
 - b. TWO – your best use of the 40 minutes class time you have.
1. I was teaching the gospel of John at Laurel Heights a few years ago; I think we had 24 classes in the gospel of John.

2. A visiting preacher was in one of our classes, and when I ask for final comments near the end of the class he said – *I just love the gospel of John ... where I preach, I've been teaching the gospel of John for three years.*
3. That would come out to about three or four verses a class.
 - a. Think about using a microscope to read WAR AND PEACE ... five minutes a day.
 - b. (Top half of the letter “B.”)
4. If you are going to be a Bible class teacher, you have to learn to think through decisions and get help from wise people ... about what is most effective in your use of time.
5. Likewise, in a Bible class period – if you have 45 minutes – your preparation needs to be carefully crafted to fit neatly into that time period, allowing for questions and comments.
6. Suitable material with wise choices about the time factor.
7. Don't get in such a hurry to satisfy a time allotment – that you get ahead of the flow of the text. Or, leave two verses out.

8. Suitable material, wisely selected with balance – **getting the word of God into the minds and lives of the people.**
- C. **The teacher needs to know the topic or text so well – if he lost his notes before class, he could still be effective.**
1. If you are teaching a specific text or passage, **FIRST** – before you do anything else, or pull up any resources – **READ IT OVER AND OVER. *Just the text.***
 2. If your assignment is Rom. 12, don't start with commentaries or words studies or the Internet or Logos ... or Facebook.
 3. **Start by reading Romans 12** – in context, several times ... from a variety of translations.
 4. Get into that habit, and the more you do that – the clearer it is what you must teach, and what the applications will be.
 5. As you gain experience, the temptation will be – when you teach Romans a second time, just pull up your previous notes.

6. May I suggest you resist that temptation; **get a fresh read in your head** and do your best work of preparation – then later in the process, check other resources and your previous notes.
7. But – always start with reading the passage several times.

D. Then, get what you have in your head typed up in an organized fashion – I would recommend, even if you don't use notes when teaching - - get your approach on paper.

1. Even if the passage outlines itself.
2. **This step helps me craft specific words and phrases I'm going to use** – and get revised and polished and clarified.
3. I want something I can look at – before I get up to teach; something I can edit and revise.
4. Delivery goes smoother for me if I know beforehand – how I'm going to approach the passage or topic.
5. I must have the main idea of that passage clear and memorable in my head – before I can help others.ⁱ

E. A word here about **Verse-to-verse teaching.**

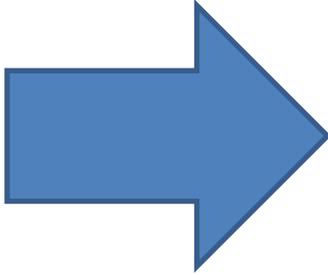
1. This would not apply to topical studies.
2. And, I believe this would not apply to narrative texts.
 - a. If you are teaching from Joshua or Judges – and in most of Acts, verse-to-verse may be a habit you should re-think.
 - b. In a narrative text, there is a story, often in chronological order.
 - c. It doesn't lend itself to verse-to-verse exposition.
 - d. If you think it does – try this experiment.
 - e. Take a nursery rhyme or secular story, and see how that sounds when you go through it phrase by phrase.
 - f. I believe you'll discover that the slow, laborious verse-by-verse method is not suitable with narrative forms.
 - g. Read the story, talk about the historical context, discuss how it fits in God's plan – and get to your take-aways.

3. With blocks of instructions, as in Romans, First Peter and James –

a. Verse-to-verse can be useful.

b. But with this caution.

c. If you are not careful, as you go through verse-by-verse – you end up giving people slices – virtually overlooking the whole, *the main point*.



4. Every section in Romans and every paragraph in James – **has one main point**. *It is connected to everything before and after – but there is a theme or main idea.*

a. Be certain you state that main point as the class begins, and repeat it as you go through.ⁱⁱ

b. If you discuss individual verses and words and phrases – **only do that, if it helps get across the main point**.

c. I think some preachers believe, if they go through a passage and leave out a word definition, or fail to discuss how a phrase is diagramed in a sentence, **their work is incomplete**.

- d. I've heard entire sermons on the preposition "in," and when we come to the word "love," we are tempted to haul out a list of all the Greek words.
- e. **What is the main point of the section you are teaching?**
- f. Is it **necessary** to define all the words, and diagram all the sentences.
- g. Does that help or distract?
- h. Are you taking precious time, that would better be used with your practical take-aways?
- i. I can't dictate the method you use – **but I do want to ask you to think through how you navigate texts.**

F. Your destination is always the same – **What does this passage mean to us today? What are the practical take-aways??**

1. What did the text mean to the original readers in their situation?
2. How does the passage fit in the over-all scheme of redemption?

3. THEN, what does it mean to us today?
- G. I've been doing this for a while – and I've finally settled on a pattern my students expect of me.
1. I spend 25-30 minutes with the material.
 2. The last 10-15 minutes will always be the **practical take-aways**.
 3. And, if there is discussion that cuts into the time – I never let discussion cut into that last ten minutes.
 4. I interrogate my class material:
 - a. Why should people care about this?
 - b. What do people really need to see in this passage?
 - c. What exhortation, what critical part of Bible knowledge and faith is here?
 - d. What do I want people to be thinking about when the class is over?
- G.** As you present your material, **your demeanor is a vital part of what you do.**
1. You've heard this expression before.

2. **People don't care what you know, unless they know that you care.**
3. **Your passion for the Word must be present – and your intention for people to understand must be clear in your tone of voice, your countenance.**
4. You are charged to speak the truth in love.
5. That is a part of what you are doing, in teaching a Bible class.
6. It cannot be a dry exercise of diagramming sentences and looking up words and chasing references and rabbits.
7. There is nothing more disheartening than a Bible class teacher who comes across LUKEWARM ... not really engaged ... just an awkward filling up of 40 minutes.
8. We can do better.

H. **Managing Class Discussion** can be one of most challenging aspects of teaching a Bible class.

1. This will vary from church to church; from teacher to teacher.
2. But in most Bible classes – there is opportunity for class participation.
3. As the teacher – you will manage that, I hope.
4. At Laurel Heights we have certain ground rules about class discussion, and we review them briefly once or twice a year.
5. We have about four things we bring up:
 - a. ONE – please keep your comments brief.
 - b. TWO – we only take discussion that is about the topic or text.
 - c. THREE – we do not allow discussion that even approaches gossip.
 - d. FOUR – It is a class, not an unmoderated debate.

6. I pause at four or five places during my class – to see if anyone has something to add – sometimes with a leading question; sometimes – just an opportunity.
 7. If possible, I always try to find something positive or grateful to say to follow-up the comment.
 8. You serve as a diplomat, a facilitator, but after the comment – you must get right back to the text or topic.
- I. The Point is to connect the Word of God to the lives of people – in the best way you can, that God may be glorified.

Letters To Young Preachers - Remember, young preacher, in addition to the obvious aim of helping people learn God's word and doing it, there is the goal of developing your students as learners. "Your teaching time is to be a stimulus, not a substitute. And the only way you'll get people personally excited about the word of God is to motivate them to get in touch with this reality firsthand," (Howard Hendricks, p.117). **You are a learner teaching people to be learners.**

It should be understood, without having to say it – **ALL THAT YOU DO IN PREACHING AND TEACHING MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY PERSONAL PRAYER.**

IV. A warning here, as I conclude –

- A. You may be very good at study, learning, office time, using resources, biblical languages, and educational methods.
- B. You may be wholeheartedly loyal to God's Word – and morally upright and effective in writing and delivery discipline.
- C. But every time you stand before a Bible class – look out there ... what do you see?

D. People.

1. They are not all the same.
2. They don't all learn the same way.
3. Some take notes – some enter into discussion – others never say anything.
4. Some are seasoned Bible students; some could not explain the difference between an apostle and an epistle.
5. You cannot adequately prepare to teach a good Bible class – if you do not take into account – the variety of people who look to you for help understanding their Bible and applying it their lives.

E. Wilson Adams posted this on Facebook last year –

The people in the pew...

They are parents burdened because of their prodigal children...
 They are grandparents raising grandchildren because if they don't...
 They are caregivers wondering if anyone understands...
 They are single parents facing double duty...
 They are brethren struggling with secret sins and failing again...
 They are smiling faces hoping to hide their depression...
 They are a childless couple facing disappointment (again)...
 They are folks facing both cancer and fears...
 They are parents who have had to do the unthinkable: bury a child...
 They are parents struggling to raise a special needs child...
 They are brothers and sisters who have done everything they know
 to keep their marriage going, but failed...
 They are widows who sit down as one at a table for two...
 They are sisters who harbor the secret of being a battered wife...
 They are stepparents who seem to be on the outside looking in...
 They are the lonely, the scared, the hurting...
 Etc.

But they come. They come to the Table to share their grief with the One who gave His all. They come to lift up their voice in song while brushing away a tear. They come to pray and connect with their only hope. They come to encourage someone else while hoping someone will encourage them. They come to hear the Good News and hope to take something away that will heal their hurt. These are the people in the pew. Funny, they look a lot like you...and me.

From
Unlocking the Scriptures
By Hans Finzel

An effective Bible teacher tries to reconstruct the meaning of the text as if he or she were actually the writer. It is something like the great conductor Toscanini bringing to life the music of Beethoven. While rehearsing Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," the musicians responded with a particular sensitivity to Toscanini's every wish and desire. What resulted was a performance that moved the men of the orchestra to a spontaneous ovation. They rose to their feet and cheered the little man who had just given them such a new and wonderful insight into the music. Desperately, Toscanini tried to stop them, waving his arms wildly, shouting to them. Finally when the ovation subsided, he said in a broken voice: "It isn't me, men— it's Beethoven." ² When interpreting Scripture, our objective is the same as Toscanini's. It isn't our meaning but the writer's original intent that we are after— and ultimately that of God Himself, communicating His truth through the writer. I cannot stress this point enough. We try to discover God's intent by asking questions of interpretation— and then answering them.

The more complex your subject, the more helpful it is to describe it in ordinary words. I'm not just talking about not using jargon. I'm talking about syllables and the rhythms of natural conversation. I'm talking about using words that are easy to get your mouth around. I'm talking about using the words that you'd use in the kitchen or on the bus. I'm talking about choosing the clearest, least stilted words you can. Listen to yourself sometime. And then eschew utilizing cumbersome terminology when a less pretentious vocabulary would adequately suffice.

ⁱ Of course, squeezing the essence from a passage usually involves sweat and tears, and it's tempting to take shortcuts. We'll impose our own agenda on the text and use it as a springboard for our favourite hot topic. Or we'll grab the first idea in the text that comes to mind and force the logic to fit.

ⁱⁱ Without a clear purpose, listeners have no reason to listen... All good communication requires a theme. If the preacher doesn't provide it, listeners will instinctively try to find a unifying thought.