

Mistakes Made In Teaching People

Introduction. In speaking to people about our faith, all of us stumble at different times. It is difficult to do it well, but all of us can do it. All it takes is a little conscious amount of effort at trying to do it right (Matthew 10:16).

If we can learn what not to do and say, a big part of our battle is won. The idea that the truth offends everyone is not always true. Most people appreciate truth and will at least consider it if it is presented correctly.

No one wants to be wrong. None of our friends or neighbors wants to be lost. None of them wants to stand before the great judge and be told, "Depart from me" (Matthew 7:23). Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" so let's talk about some of the mistakes to avoid when we teach people.

I. Do Not Do All The Talking

- A. Stephen Covey said, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply" (cp. James 1:19, 26; 3:1-2).
- B. Those who monopolize a conversation lose their audience, so avoid being a "motor mouth" (Proverbs 21:23).
- C. It is important to ask questions (Acts 8:30) and get the person talking, especially about their contact with religion, if any. Let them read the scriptures that are being studied so they can let the word of God speak to them.

II. Do Not Begin With Criticism

- A. If we are not careful, we will fall into the trap of thinking that the first task in teaching is showing our prospect where his religion is wrong.
- B. Christ taught positively at first, then moved on to offer His criticisms at a later time (Luke 4:21; Matthew 23:1-33). In Paul's most critical letter to the churches, he began with commendation then worked his way toward condemnation (1 Corinthians 1:1-9; cp. 5:1; 11:17).
- C. The Lord and His apostles always seemed to be able to find something commendable to say about people before they began to expose their faults or answer their objections. We should do likewise.

III. Do Not Act Superior

- A. Christians have a great temptation to be egotistical. It is possible and perhaps even easy to think we know more than other people, and anybody who is not a member of the church is just ignorant or dishonest.

- B. You may very well be much more knowledgeable than the person you are teaching, but you cannot be haughty and boastful about it (cp. Colossians 4:6). A Christian ought to “esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3; cp. Luke 18:9-14; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 15:10). You were once in the same position as they!

IV. Do Not Always Try To Answer Everything The Other Person Says

- A. It is not compromising to admit that another person is right when they are right about something. When someone says something that is true, commend them for it, and if possible, offer the scriptural justification for their point (John 4:17). It shows that you are trying to be objective and honest.
- B. At times, everyone gets stumped. Whether about the Bible or religion in general, there are many subjects which are deep and difficult. You should not be afraid to say, “I don’t know the answer to that question. But I am sure that if we spend a little time studying, the Bible will provide the answer. Let’s talk about that next time.” Admitting you do not know takes an enormous amount of pressure off of you (Proverbs 10:19; 17:27).
- C. Concentrate on just a few important points. Many points are not worth arguing about the first time they are broached; some, on the other hand, are basic and fundamental to an understanding of other subjects. Learn to draw a distinction between what matters and what does not. Talk about the important ones, and put off the less significant ones until another time.

V. Do Not Use Too Many Passages Of Scripture

- A. It is much better to talk about a few scriptures than a long list. Why? Because the mind can only retain a few thoughts at once. If you only teach one passage, and get the message of that one across, you may prove very successful.
- B. Philip concentrated on just two verses of Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah in his conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:32-35; cp. Isaiah 53:7-8). Yet, he led him to the Lord and baptized him that same day. Actually, there are not many scriptures quoted in the sermons in Acts either (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 30-31, 34-35; 3:22, 25; 4:24-26; 13:22).

VI. Do Not Get Angry

- A. Anger is the surest confession of defeat for a teacher. Always remain calm, under control, and considerate of others, demonstrating godly character (Proverbs 14:17; cp. Acts 24:25).

B. Kindness carries as much weight in a heated discussion as logical arguments (1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 6:4-6; Colossians 3:12).

Conclusion. Try not to make these mistakes, but by all means, make an effort to save the lost. All of us need to be busy doing the most important work in life — winning souls. As someone said, “Everyone wants to tell you how to do personal work, but no one wants to do it.” We have to be workers in the vineyard of the Lord (Matthew 20:1-16). Use your words to bring grace to the hearer (Ephesians 4:29).