

Devotion from the past ... 2005

Extended reading: [1 Timothy 1:1-11](#)

Advice to Teachers

“It’s true that moral guidance and counsel need to be given, but the way you say it and to whom you say it are as important as what you say” (1 Timothy 1:1-8).

The Lord be with you.

Can you imagine Timothy of old teaching third grade? Or maybe leading the junior high Bible study group. Or checking togas for proper length or logos? We know that Paul taught Timothy how to teach. Recently, archaeologists found an ancient bulletin board buried under several layers of coarse dust. Some theorized that the board may go back to the first century A.D. Barely visible after years of disuse, it contained a fossilized document, which was analyzed and thought to contain a list of memory work assignments. And some student art work. But more about this later.

According to Paul, the content of our lesson plans is important. Moral guidance is an important element of Christian teaching. Sadly, some (not Lutherans, of course) equate Christian education only with moral counsel and the 23,890,583,219,305,416 SHOULDs associated with Christian living. (I apologize to all of you reading this aloud to your staff without having looked at it first. I don’t know what the number is either!)

Paul’s lesson plans sometimes got him beat up. Perhaps his content wasn’t too popular—or maybe it was the way he said it. (Thus the advice to Timothy?) The content of your lessons may have similar results for you. Grizzled veterans of Lutheran classrooms, confirmation classes, Sunday schools, youth groups, and even adult Bible classes owe at least some of their grizzle to those who have attacked them (albeit verbally, socially, emotionally, or spiritually) for teaching God’s truth.

God’s truth is that they are sinners. Okay, so are we. And the truth hurts—if not them, then us. Herein lies a simple conclusion that we who teach religion may forget in the blotted pages of lesson plans: We cannot teach morality without teaching forgiveness.

Forgiveness is what allows teachers to practice care and compassion in teaching content. Sinful behavior is indeed bad. Bad? It is deadly. No matter how earnestly we teach the “shoulds” of Christianity, we must deal with failure. Or, sometimes, delusion. There is more to religion than rules.

Teach students that God broke the rules. (Okay, so the Elders might get a little

hostile with that statement. Talk about a Pauline experience ...) Teach students that God and only God could break the rules, because He made the rules in the first place. (This is not to paint God as the first One to say, "Because I said so.")

God's rules were good. Even great. They were the formula for a perfectly happy life. But God's rules also said that if you broke God's rules, you were doomed. Kind of like leaving the church kitchen messy ...

God's rules said that you paid for broken rules with a life lived apart from Him. A timeout. Only forever! But God loved the world so much, that He ... you finish the story. That's the story we can never forget to tell. And, once again, it's that story that enables us to teach God's will kindly, compassionately, and timely.

Oh, about the archaeological treasure mentioned earlier. Carbon dating takes it back only to 1970. Hmm, the handwriting looks a little like mine. With a little cleaning, I could probably use it again.

Praise to You, Lord Christ!

Pray: Thank You, dear Father, for teaching us not only what to teach but how to teach it. Cause us always to remember what the Gospel has done to sin, not to minimize it but to give us an ever-greater gratitude for the work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24–25)