

1.8 Does God really judge teachers more severely? Why?

Thoughts on the Awesome Responsibility of Children's Teachers in the Church

"Daphne loves your class," a mother confided one Sunday. "She tells me about all she's learning and she's becoming so eager to read her Bible at home!"

I was grateful for this mother's encouragement. Looking back on six years of ministry with the junior high girls' class, I can see both fruit and failure.

A long line of faces pass before me, girls and parents I have been privileged to introduce to Jesus. "Thank You, God," I say, remembering them, "for the matchless privilege of teaching Your Word."

But I see other faces too. Disturbing faces. There is a girl I'll call Tammie, who was one of my first students. Recent visits with Tammie have revealed her immoral life, her searching in drugs and sex, her aimless wandering, the wretched waste of her brilliant mind. I remember when she began missing Sunday school, and the visits I made later to the psychiatric ward of a local hospital to see her. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be 13 and have repeated periods of depression so severe that hospitalization was required. I wondered, if I'd been there the very first time Tammie missed Sunday school, if I'd prayed for her more earnestly, would her life be any different today? I tried. Could I have tried harder? Tried earlier.

I think of the many I've had a part in winning to Christ, and the many that have been lost, perhaps partly through my negligence. Of course, each person is accountable to God for his or her own response to His Word. But each teacher also has great influence and responsibility.

Surely all of us have asked the question – What does God expect of me as a teacher? I remember visiting a young woman who had just moved into the neighborhood. She was not interested in Jesus Christ, she informed me, for she was an atheist. Everything had come about by evolution, by total chance, she believed. How had she come to this bleak conclusion? An influential high school teacher had won her thinking. What an awful responsibility that teacher has!

But what a greater responsibility I have! I know Jesus Christ. He has saved me and given me joy and hope, purpose and meaning in life. God expects more of me as a teacher of His Word, I am sure.

James 3:1 tells us, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (NASB), Or as The Living Bible puts it, "When we teachers of religion, who should know better, do wrong, our punishment will be greater than it would be for others." God judges teachers more severely – I cannot deny it!

But why should God be harder on us? Because teachers are leaders of others, especially of the young. We are not accountable for ourselves only, but for all those we lead, and for those who in turn follow them. Every Christian has more influence than he knows, but a teacher's influence is multiplied many times. Isn't it right that God should hold us accountable for more, since more

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influence has been entrusted to us? Jesus said, “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

Many of my students come from non-Christian homes. Their parents do not profess to follow God. The students do not expect them to behave like Christians. I teach them about Jesus. I urge them to trust Him as Savior, to open every area of their lives to Him. Isn't it right for them to assume that I will do what I urge upon them?

What then? Has a teacher no privacy at all? No, not really. Every teacher's life is open before God and the world. Paul addresses teachers in Romans 2:21. “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?” (NASB). If I am a teacher of God's Word, I cannot build fences around certain areas -- any area of my life.

Teaching God's Word is no easy road. It demands the utmost thought and diligence, both in actual teaching and in making my life consistent with my teaching. Paul exhorted Timothy, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (1 Timothy 4:16, NASB). The teacher's responsibility is twofold. We must know the Word of God and lead our pupils aright; we must also walk in the way we set before them.

God has given me an enormous task. God expects a lot of me as a teacher. But He has given me the Holy Spirit to enable me to measure up. God helping me, I aim to be everything He expects.

What about you?