



Christ Church Blackpool

Teaching in the Local Church

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Biblical Definition of Teaching:	2
2. Who can teach?	3
3. Bid T and little t teaching	5
4. Pheobe and Mary	7
5. At Christ Church	9

Introduction:

This paper explores the biblical meaning and practice of teaching in the local church, with particular attention to who may teach and how teaching should be overseen. It argues that Scripture presents teaching both as a shared responsibility among all believers and as a particular duty of elders, who are entrusted with guarding sound doctrine. By considering key biblical passages, the distinction between informal mutual instruction and authoritative doctrinal teaching, and examples such as Phoebe and Mary Magdalene, it seeks to clarify how Christ Church can encourage the gifts of the whole congregation while maintaining faithful elder oversight of public teaching.

1. Biblical Definition of Teaching:

- **The Scriptures**

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Colossians 3:16

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

James 1:5

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

Biblical teaching is a transformative process that shapes character, deepens spiritual understanding, and promotes growth in individuals, the church, and beyond.

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), Jesus commands his followers to make disciples by teaching them to obey all he has commanded. This shows that teaching is not merely the transfer of information, but the relational and lived communication of God's commands, flowing from active faith in Christ and genuine love for those being taught.

2. Who can teach?

In the Great Commission, Jesus commands all his followers to teach others about him; however, in 1 Timothy 2, Paul appears to place limits on women teaching.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Was Jesus' command to teach given to all his followers, or only to the men, particularly the apostles or elders? At first glance, many have taken 1 Timothy 2 as a strong reason to prohibit women from teaching outside women's groups and children's ministry, concluding that all church teaching should be carried out only by male elders.

But should 1 Timothy 2 be understood that way?

To answer that, we must interpret the meaning of "teach" in light of the whole of Scripture.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:6-8

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

1 Corinthians 14:26

When we read the wider New Testament, the answer appears to be no. These passages show that teaching is not restricted to elders, nor even to men alone. Paul expects both men and women to teach and instruct others according to the gifts they have received.

Ephesians 4 reinforces this point by presenting teachers as gifts Christ gives to the church to build up the body. Since Paul does not assign these gifts by gender, we can assume that Christ may equip both men and women as

prophets, evangelists, teachers and so on. Therefore, those who exercise the gift of teaching may not always be elders, though such teaching should remain under the wider oversight and doctrinal care of the elders.

3. Bid T and little t teaching

Throughout the New Testament letters of Paul the word *didaskēin* (teaching) is used in two subtly different ways, in which Andrew Wilson helpfully calls big-T and little-t teaching:

1. Sometimes Paul encourages everyone to participate in “t” teaching each other according to their gift (explaining the Scriptures to each other peer-to-peer).
2. Sometimes, notably in the Pastoral letters, Paul talks about elders T Teaching (the definition and defence of Christian doctrine).

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

1 Timothy 3:2

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Titus 1:9

In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul says an overseer, or elder, must be “able to teach,” making teaching ability a requirement for this leadership role. Likewise, Titus 1:9 says elders must hold firmly to sound doctrine so they can instruct the church and refute those who oppose it.

Taken together, these passages support Andrew Wilson's “Big T/Little T” distinction. Although Scripture does not use those exact terms, it does distinguish between authoritative doctrinal oversight entrusted to elders and the mutual, everyday instruction shared by the whole congregation, as outlined below.

"Big T" Teaching: Elder-Led, Authoritative Doctrine

The New Testament sets a high bar for the formal teaching of core doctrines, protecting the church from heresy. This task is tied to the office of Elder/Overseer.

- **Titus 1:9** – “He [An elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”
- **1 Timothy 3:2 & 5:17** – Elders must be “able to teach”, and Paul later notes that elders who “labor in preaching and teaching” are worthy of double honor. This establishes teaching as a primary, formal function of their governance.

- **Titus 2:1** – Paul charges Titus (a church leader) to "teach what accords with sound doctrine." The Greek word here (*hygiainousē didaskalia*) refers to the healthy, non-negotiable core truths of the faith.

"Little I" Teaching: Congregational, Mutual Encouragement

Conversely, Scripture commands *all* believers to teach, counsel, and build one another up. This is not authoritative, pulpit-style doctrinal definition, but rather the peer-to-peer application of faith.

- **Colossians 3:16** – "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..."
- **Romans 15:14** – Paul writes to the entire Roman church, stating he is satisfied that they are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another."
- **Titus 2:3-4** – Older women are commanded to be "teachers of what is good" so they can "train the young women to love their husbands and children." This is life-to-life discipleship rather than elder-governed doctrinal oversight.

4. Pheobe and Mary

This poses the question: Are only elders permitted to teach the fundamental doctrines and hard truths of the gospel?

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Romans 16:1–2

Many have noticed that this passage points to Paul entrusting arguably his most dense, complex theological letter he ever wrote to Phoebe. This meant Paul trusted her not just to protect the physical parchment, but to handle its explosive content.

In antiquity, a letter carrier was far more than a postman. They would travel to the destination, deliver the letter and very often read it aloud to the community. Because ancient Greek text was written in *scriptura continua* (all capital letters, with no spaces, punctuation, or paragraph breaks), reading a letter required intense preparation. The reader had to know where sentences began and ended, where the author would pause for dramatic effect, and which tone of voice to use.

Furthermore, if the listeners were confused by a dense passage—such as Paul's complex arguments about justification, Israel, or the law—they would naturally turn to the person who brought it. The carrier, having spent time with the author before departure, was the logical authority to clarify the author's intent.

Prominent New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has written extensively on this exact point. He emphasizes that Phoebe's role effectively made her the world's very first commentator on the book of Romans.

"Paul entrusted that letter to a 'deacon' called Phoebe whose work was taking her to Rome. The letter-bearer would normally be the one to read it out to the recipients and explain its contents. The first expositor of Paul's greatest letter was an ordained travelling businesswoman."

N.T. Wright: *Women Bishops: It's About the Bible, not Fake ideas of Progress.*

By sending Phoebe, Paul wasn't just sending a letter; he was sending an authorized interpreter equipped to unpack the deep "Big T" doctrines of grace, unity, and salvation to a divided Roman church.

Some may argue that this remains speculative. While we can be confident this was the normal practice in first-century Greco-Roman society, we do not have a direct record of Phoebe teaching the church in Rome. However,

Scripture does give us another example of a woman commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the good news. It was Mary Magdalene, not Peter, James, or John, who first announced the resurrection to the first community of Jesus' followers. We often think of Peter's sermon at Pentecost as the first Christian proclamation, but before that, Jesus entrusted Mary with the task of telling the disciples—the church—that he had risen.

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:17-18

Therefore, even **"T"** teaching is not limited to male elders alone. However, Scripture is clear that the elders of each local church are responsible for ensuring that the church in their care holds fast to the truths of Scripture and does not depart from them.

In summary, elders have a particular responsibility to preach and guard the doctrines of Scripture. The Bible presents this responsibility as belonging to all elders, though some will carry it more regularly than others. Elders may also draw on the gifts and expertise of other church members, both men and women, while remaining ultimately responsible before Christ to ensure that God's people are well fed and protected from false doctrine. Some may argue that Phoebe did not hold the role N.T. Wright describes; yet whether or not she preached and taught Paul's letter to the Romans, Scripture indicates that the responsibility for safeguarding sound doctrine rested not with Phoebe, but with the elders of the church in Rome.

5. At Christ Church

At Christ Church, most public preaching and teaching is carried out by the elders, primarily Ben. Non-elders may also teach from time to time, but before doing so publicly they must submit their material to an elder for feedback. This creates a collaborative process: the speaker carries the immediate teaching, while the elders provide oversight.

In this way, the elders give spiritual direction to the church's teaching and help safeguard the truth of God's Word as it is shared publicly. At the same time, the church benefits from the gifts, experience, and insight of believers outside the eldership team.