

Introduction to the Biblical Standards for Teachers

First Presbyterian Church
Lakeland, Florida

Thank you for your interest in teaching. We believe that God has uniquely gifted some believers as teachers in the church. As with any gift or tool, actually taking it off the shelf and employing it for its useful purpose helps us to learn and become better stewards of our gifts. The author of Hebrews instructs that it is by “constant use” of putting the truth of the gospel into action, that we mature in our faith and sharpen our gifts (Hebrews 5:14). The adage rings true,

Tell me and I forget; teach me and I may remember; involve me and I learn.

As a church, it is our duty and pleasure to encourage members to explore and use their gifts. No follower of Jesus is perfect, and the best of teachers have flaws, but God still calls imperfect, flawed sinners to teach faith to others. We are excited to have believers who are attentive to the Holy Spirit in their lives and feel led and eager to teach.

Every church has a responsibility to choose, support, and oversee its teachers. We have been doing that since we began in 1885. In this document we want to clearly express what has been our tradition since our inception. We introduce no new ideas, just a new tool that we hope brings clarity. Please set aside some time to prayerfully consider the attached document. Feel free to ask questions for clarity. If you can affirm the standards, sign it. You will receive a copy and a copy will be on file in the church office.

We are eager to journey with you with grace, truth, and joy to see each person of the church working together toward the goal of walking closer with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Biblical Standards for Teachers

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We define a teacher broadly in this church. For us, a teacher is a person who is leading others in biblical truth for Christian living. This may be on the church campus or off campus but still under the umbrella of the church.

The Gift of Teaching

In the Church, the Holy Spirit has equipped each member in a unique manner (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and Romans 12:3-8). The spiritual gift of teaching the faith is the ability to clearly explain the Christian faith and equip other Christians to understand God's word and relate it practically to their life. Not everyone has this gift, but those who do are incredibly valuable to the Church.

The Basis for All Teaching

The Bible, as the inspired and infallible Word of God, is our final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of humankind. References to Scripture in our Book of Confessions and Book of Order, our constitutional documents, are numerous. To name a few, they teach us Scripture is the "unique and authoritative witness" to Jesus Christ and "not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel" (Confession of 1967, 9:27). It is the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture that is the "Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined" (Westminster Confession, 6.010).

Final Interpretative Authority

In our church, we encourage robust learning, including issues that are or were controversial. That does not mean we teach all things as being true, but that we are eager to study and learn. In our church, for all doctrine, practice, policy, faith, and discipline, it is the Session who has the final interpretive authority of Scriptural meaning and application. They do this under the authority of Scripture, guidance of our constitution, and leadership of the pastors.

The Qualities of a Teacher

A teacher is committed to spiritual maturity. All teachers are encouraged to practice the fundamental disciplines of regular time in the Word, active prayer life, involvement in fellowship with other believers, and growth in their commitment to Jesus Christ (see Colossians 1:10, Matthew 6:33).

A teacher is committed to preparation and study. Teachers are held to a higher standard and will be judged more strictly (James 3:1, 2 Peter 2:1-22). We hope this causes respect and not fear in considering one’s role in teaching. It is a high standard, but also a glorious calling.

A teacher is committed to a Christ-honoring life. Although we are all sinners and perfection is an impossible standard we do not expect, we know how disruptive it is when a teacher lives a habitual, unrepentant sinful lifestyle. Several places in the New Testament remind us there is a wide range of behaviors, from idolatry to sexual sin to gossip to arrogance (see Romans 1:18-32 or 1 Peter 4:1-11 as examples), that are not Christ-honoring, and we are to strive to live otherwise.

If Concerns Arise

Every church must be prepared to deal with any concerns that arise in the teaching ministry. What has been true all along and here is made clear is that if a problem were to arise, the final authority to resolve the problem rests with the Session (see Book of Order, G-2.0301, G-1.0402). The ordinary exercise of that authority is through the pastors working together with the Discipleship Committee, who will work through a careful, thoughtful, prayerful, process of discernment and restorative steps.

I have prayerfully reviewed the statements above. I agree to be governed by these tenets and put myself under the authority of church leadership.

Name Date

In lieu of signing the above document, I request to meet with some elders to discuss this.

Name Contact Information