

## Good Teachers and Bad Students

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Dedicated teachers face many perplexing problems. First, the subject material must be mastered. What did the author mean by that? Upon what factors does a practical grasp of the subject depend? What other resources bear on the point? What principles? Next, effective presentation must be planned. What approach is best? What illustrations? And, careful thought must be given to students. How can he be motivated? What will most help her achieve her potential?

Teaching is challenging. Good teaching involves changing behavior. Therefore, teaching is not only challenging, but noble. And teaching can certainly be perplexing.

Inevitably all dedicated teachers must face one of teaching's most perplexing problems. That is, why is a bad pupil bad? Is it because of bad teaching? All teachers would do well to not only ask, but to analyze and try to answer such a question in honest personal evaluation.

Some, owing to self-service or self-delusion, may easily dismiss the question. "Bad students don't spoil the teacher," they would say. Look at those students who are learning and growing. But, before dismissing the question too easily, have you noticed how some students can learn and grow despite bad teaching and bad teachers? We have all known them. Oh, that all could be such students! Because all are not, we who teach need constantly to review and improve our methods.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the most effective teacher will not get through to some students. Perhaps, our question should be restated, "Why do good teachers have bad students?" Good teachers certainly do. The greatest teacher of all history had one of the worst students.

Judas did not simply fall short of Jesus' teaching. It is more substantive than that. Peter just fell short. Peter, though well intentioned, denied his Lord when he broke down in a moment of crisis. Not so Judas. Judas' betrayal was not just a failure to measure up to the standard he was taught. And it was not that he didn't know better. He did. You can see it in his sorrow.

Judas rebelled. He rebelled against the principles of honesty and loyalty and love he had been taught by the Master Teacher. More, he rebelled against the whole body of knowledge that Jesus expounded. Not just the teaching, he rebelled against the exemplary example lived by Jesus. He rebelled against everything for which the Master stood. Worst, he rebelled against the Teacher Himself.

Why would he do such a thing? How could he? He knew far too much! He had witnessed too much! It seems that even Judas didn't understand. Read Matthew 27:310. It wasn't the agreed price he received for his betrayal. He gave it back. It wasn't that rebellious resolve had carried him through the ordeal. The record says he repented himself. Nor was it a stubborn refusal to admit wrong. He had confessed his sin. And it wasn't that he did not realize the Savior's innocence. I seriously doubt it was that he

blamed Jesus for any inadequacy of His teaching. Why was it? I don't think Judas himself understood. I certainly don't.

Inevitably, every teacher and most parents will, to some degree, grapple with the same kind of problem student, as did Jesus. Why parents? Because, finally, a good parent is a good teacher. If the parent has only one child he may, at some point, encounter a rebellious note. If he has more than one child, he will more likely have to deal with rebellion. Three or more, and it is almost a certainty.

Education throughout history is cluttered with failures. Nero was educated with great care by a noted stoic philosopher. Seneca was a brilliant speaker, writer and teacher. He upheld a strict moral code. During Nero's first few years on the throne of Rome his rule was acclaimed for social justice and sensible economics. There were big, successful public works projects. Good government. In short, it seems he was responsible and effective. Seneca's effectiveness as a teacher seemed confirmed. Then, Nero turned bad. He forced Seneca to suicide. He divorced his wife, and then executed her. He murdered his mother and started such a life of debauchery and neglected duty as would be hard to duplicate. He ruined the empire. And he provoked the people to revolt. Many accuse him of setting fire to Rome. Finally he took his own life.

Such bad students as Nero and Judas do not just wander aimlessly off the path enticed by some immoral goodie or led by some evil companion. They are above that. They are not dull students, slow of learning, incapable of staying on course. Such students are bright, but bad. They are not stupid, just surly. They seem to deliberately attack the teacher. Why?! Why, especially when the teacher has taught with such exceptional goodness, even brilliance?

At the core of their behavior is rebellion. They no doubt learn and retain many valuable lessons. They probably learn a type of self-discipline. They learn how to learn. And how to apply new lessons. They learn to emulate what they value in the lives of others. They may even learn to abide by a certain moral code though not the whole of what they are taught. But, all the good work of a godly teacher or parent turns sour under the heading of rebellion. Rebellion is such a terrible sin! There is none worse. It rings of a finality that has seared the pages of history and cries out in the darkness of eternity. Rebellion against God's ways. How utterly final!

All too common it is to find a son who rebels against his father; a daughter against her mother. If not the most serious cases of student failure in history, they must certainly be among the most painful. A negative note on which to end, you say? You are right, of course. I'm sorry the end has come to this. What is the solution, you ask? "Why do good teachers have bad students?" I must confess, as a teacher I don't know, and as a parent I'm still perplexed. I am forced to stand with Judas and mumble sadly, "I don't know why."

I can only sound a warning. Teachers must be more diligent, more dedicated to reaching every student. It's about changing behavior. Making them better people. Parents must be more careful, more loving in shaping and molding each child while still young. Very young. And pray fervently for the outcome. May the Lord help us all in this greatest of human endeavors.