

December 2025

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TEACHING AND PREACHING

During His ministry Jesus Christ spent virtually all of His time teaching and preaching. These two things (teaching and preaching) overlap to a considerable degree. But there is also some distinction between them. But in Christ's ministry they certainly go together. So in looking at Scriptures about teaching and preaching, for a start let's just limit ourselves to the Gospel of Matthew, to avoid using Scriptures that refer to the same events in the other gospels.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, **and preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, **and preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Matthew 9:35)

And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, He departed thence **to teach and to preach** in their cities. (Matthew 11:1)

In Christ's ministry teaching and preaching are inseparable. Let's look at the two Greek verbs involved here.

The Greek verb translated as "**to teach**" (i.e. "didasko") literally refers to **holding a discourse**. That implies input from at least two parties. In other words, in the N.T. "teaching" does **not** refer to "**lecturing**". Lecturing is certainly a very valid form of teaching. But that form of teaching is not what the word "teaching" in the N.T. refers to. A discourse is a form of teaching by means of talking with people, answering questions, and discussing things, with input from the hearers. The N.T. form of teaching potentially involved input from those who were being taught, even if that input was mostly only in the form of questions.

Now the Greek verb here translated as "**to preach**" (i.e. "kerusso") refers to **making an announcement**. Preaching does not require any input or feedback from the people who are listening to the preaching. Thus lecturing people, where no feedback is intended during such a lecture, can certainly be included in the word preaching.

However, while the meanings of the Greek words may imply these small distinctions between these two activities, the fact is that in Christ's ministry these two activities, **teaching and preaching, always go together**. So there is no point in trying to separate these two activities, as they apply to Jesus Christ's own ministry.

Regarding what things we are to teach and to preach, Jesus Christ said the following:

Whosoever therefore **shall break** one of these least **commandments**, and shall **teach men so**, he shall be called the least (by those who are) in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever **shall do and teach them**, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

This statement is not about preaching. It is about teaching. In this case it involves interacting with people by **setting an example** for other people. By contrast, lecturing people does not necessarily require the people doing the lecturing themselves to set any examples. In this Scripture the negative example is that of breaking God's commandments, and **thereby teaching other people** to also break God's laws.

We need to recognize that setting an example, good or bad, is a form of teaching other people. In fact, this is probably Satan's most powerful weapon in trying to lead humanity into sin. Setting an **example of commandment-breaking** will in this age always find some followers. Bad examples are unfortunately some of the most powerful teachers. In this age one bad example will typically gain more followers than 100 good examples.

Note also Christ's statement regarding setting good examples. **Doing good must precede teaching good**. We ourselves have to put God's commandments into practice in our own lives, **before** we can teach God's commandments to other people.

And we should recognize that in many cases "**the commandments of men**" are in conflict with the commandments of God. And so we should not be teaching the commandments of men, meaning religious teachings (e.g. customs and traditions, as the Pharisees were doing) that are contrary to God's laws

This people draw nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honor Me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from Me. But **in vain** they do worship Me, **teaching for** doctrines **the commandments of men**. (Matthew 15:8-9)

After His resurrection in His final instructions to His apostles Jesus Christ said:

Go you therefore, and **teach all nations** to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the age. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20, corrected text)

So Jesus Christ gave His apostles, and through them to the whole ministry of His Church, **the responsibility to teach** all nations everything He had taught them. Again, in this commission **the focus is on teaching** through interaction with people. In other words, teaching takes place through answering questions, responding to the things that people want to know, and through setting good examples.

The focus in this commission is not on "preaching", i.e. the focus is not on making some announcement regarding what God will do in the near future. No, the real focus is on **interacting with people**, giving

them answers to their questions, and refuting false teachings that they may present, or that they may be exposed to.

HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TEACHES US

The holy spirit is also identified as a major help in teaching people the truth of God. For the original 11 apostles that had been present at the last Passover, the holy spirit would be an enormous help in teaching others. So notice:

But the Comforter, *which is the holy spirit*, which the Father will send in My name, it **shall teach you all things**, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

This is important to understand.

How was the holy spirit going to teach those original apostles after Jesus Christ had returned to God the Father in heaven? This is where the Greek word for “teach” explains the process to some degree.

It was not going to be a case of the holy spirit just bringing things into their minds. The holy spirit would only bring things to their minds if the apostles fulfilled **their part in this process**. But if they did not do their part, then the holy spirit would do nothing to bring things into their minds.

For example, all of those 11 original apostles had been at the last Passover that Jesus Christ observed. Mark’s gospel account was basically dictated by the Apostle Peter. So Matthew’s Gospel and Mark’s Gospel and John’s Gospel all represent eyewitness accounts of that last Passover. Luke was not one of the original disciples, and he wasn’t present at that last Passover, and so we can omit Luke’s Gospel in this specific discussion.

Now **neither Matthew nor Peter** (i.e. Mark’s Gospel) **remembered anything at all about the foot washing** that Jesus Christ had introduced at that last Passover. **Why didn’t** the holy spirit bring this to their minds when they were writing these events down in their accounts of Christ’s ministry? I mean, it is **a major omission** in Matthew’s Gospel and in Mark’s Gospel, to say nothing at all about the foot washing.

Christ didn’t say that the holy spirit would “preach” to those apostles. No, Christ said that the holy spirit would “teach” them certain things. As already stated, the Greek word for teaching involves a certain amount of give-and-take, a certain amount of interaction between two parties. A basic thing for us to understand here is this:

The holy spirit never makes any decisions!

The holy spirit is not a decision-making entity. The holy spirit **cannot** make any decisions. The holy spirit

cannot decide what we need to understand, or what the original apostles needed to understand. The holy spirit does not have a mind of its own; it is just a source of staggering power. But **it does not have the ability to think any thoughts!**

It is only individual beings that have the ability to think any thoughts. But since the holy spirit is not “a person” or an individual, therefore the holy spirit itself cannot think any thoughts.

So here is the process of what happened with those apostles:

Let's take Matthew and Peter (for Mark's Gospel) as examples. For Matthew and Peter to correctly recall everything from that last Passover, **they had to focus their minds** on recalling those events. For example, Peter himself had to think about and recall the incident when Christ washed their feet. Had Peter done that, then the power of the holy spirit would have helped him to recall **all the details** correctly. If Peter himself didn't think about the incident when Christ had washed his feet, then the holy spirit was also **not going to be able** to help Peter recall correctly the details at that occasion. And that is precisely what happened with Peter ... and so Mark's Gospel does not mention anything at all about the foot washing.

For this type of situation (not necessarily for other situations) we might think of the holy spirit as **a large database**. But if we don't know **what to search for**, then that data base doesn't tell us anything. By “this type of situation” I mean **occasions that require perfect recall** of things that happened in the past. The information which the database will reveal to us depends on **the questions we ask**; it depends on the search criteria we enter into that database.

None of those 11 original apostles, including the Apostle John, recalled the foot washing during the next 30 years after Christ's ministry. And then in teaching the Apostle Paul “out of season” Jesus Christ Himself didn't mention the foot washing to Paul either. It's not that Peter and Matthew were somehow not as good at remembering things as John. During those first 30 years **none of them** remembered the foot washing from amongst the many hundreds of other things they had experienced during Christ's ministry.

It was only **another 30 years later**, in the 90s A.D., that the Apostle John recalled the foot washing. How did John recall it? **By asking himself the right questions about Christ's last Passover**. And once John asked himself the right questions, **then** the holy spirit gave him access to the database with all the relevant information pertaining to John's questions.

It always comes back to “**ask** and you shall receive ...”. What God gives us to understand always depends on the questions we ask God. And when we don't ask, then frequently we also don't receive. God does not spoonfeed anybody. The questions we ask God reveal what our minds are focusing on. Our questions reveal to God how our minds work.

So when those original apostles asked the right questions, **then** the holy spirit would help them find the correct answers. That is how John 14:26 worked for those apostles. But the holy spirit did not give them any recall information about other events that had happened, when the apostles themselves did not

focus their own minds on those other events.

Let's apply this to us receiving God's holy spirit after repentance and baptism.

We ourselves determine **what information the holy spirit will enable us to understand**. Depending on the questions we ask God, the holy spirit will then open to us access to information / understanding that is connected to the questions we ask. But the holy spirit will not just make available to us understanding that has nothing to do with what we were thinking about. So, for example, **if we have no interest** in establishing whether or not God wants us to use the Jewish calendar, then God's spirit will assuredly not give us any understanding in this matter.

Now you and I did not experience any part of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. And so we have not been promised perfect recall of anything. So how does God's spirit teach us today? For us it is a matter of the first part of John 14:26. The holy spirit will **"teach us all things"** that we put our minds to.

For us it is not a matter of recall. For us it is a matter of **receiving correct understanding**. But the process is basically the same. **We have to focus** on a specific subject or question. And we have to **ask the right questions**. If we earnestly "ask ... seek ... knock ...", then God's spirit will give us access to a better and more complete understanding.

So note!

The holy spirit can "teach" us, but it cannot "preach" to us!

The holy spirit, which we received from God after baptism, cannot make an announcement to us, and it **cannot give us a lecture or a specific message**. This is another way of saying that the holy spirit cannot preach to us.

Here I am not talking about God in the Old Testament giving certain prophets "thus says the LORD" messages. Those "thus says the LORD" situations involved Jesus Christ (and at times an angel), **in addition to** the holy spirit. Those messages didn't originate with the holy spirit; they originated with Jesus Christ, who used the holy spirit as a vehicle for conveying messages to His servants.

Here I am talking about New Testament times, the time period in which all of us live. Without additional input from God the Father or from Jesus Christ the holy spirit cannot convey any messages to us. But the holy spirit can, without additional input from God, give us access to information from "the database" that makes up the truth of God.

But to be of any benefit in the area of activity we are discussing here, **the holy spirit requires input from us**. We have to ask the right questions; we have to look for a better understanding. Once our minds have asked the questions, **then** the holy spirit can make access to the answers available to us, provided that we are willing to work in order to get the correct answers. That is the access that every

person, who has God's spirit, automatically has, and that form of teaching requires no additional input from God the Father or from Jesus Christ.

That form of teaching is the benefit of having God's holy spirit. And people who don't have God's spirit simply don't have any access to that "database" of God's truth. So when God opens a person's mind to the truth of God, then that is God's doing, and not the holy spirit acting on its own. And if that person responds the right way to that limited amount of understanding that God has made available, then God will open up more information to that person.

This process continues as long as that person progresses towards real repentance. And if that person then does indeed repent and is baptized, then God will give that person His holy spirit. And the holy spirit will then give the person total access to the whole "database" of God's truth, but always contingent on whatever "search criteria" the person presents to the holy spirit. Our input is "ask ... seek ... knock".

That is teaching, as identified by the N.T. Greek word "didasko".

For Paul and the other apostles at that time the two activities of teaching and preaching also always went together. The word "apostle" refers to "one who is sent with a message". And delivering a message does not require any input from those who receive that message. So the word "**apostle**" automatically requires that apostle **to preach**. The "message" those original apostles were to preach is that **they were eyewitnesses** of Christ's ministry. They were to faithfully transmit what they had seen and heard. For all those who have been called by God to be apostles, preaching is a major component of their calling.

If a man who is sent with "a message from God" does not deliver any message, **then that person is also not an apostle**. "Apostle" is not a title but **a job description**. And if there is no message that needs to be delivered, then there is also no need for any apostles.

Here are some references that demonstrate that the apostles also did both, teaching and preaching.

Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, **teaching and preaching** the word of the Lord, with many others also. (Acts 15:35)

Preaching the kingdom of God, **and teaching** those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:31)

Whereunto I am ordained **a preacher, and** an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) **a teacher** of the nations in faith and truth. (1 Timothy 2:7)

Whereunto I am appointed **a preacher**, and an apostle, **and a teacher** of the nations. (2 Timothy 1:11)

It is interesting to note how God has structured His Church. Paul spelled this out to the Corinthians as follows. Note:

And God has set some in the church, **first** apostles, **secondarily** prophets, **thirdly** teachers, **after that** miracles, **then** gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of languages. *Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?* (1 Corinthians 12:28-29)

By using the terms “first ... second ... third ... after that ... then ...” Paul is establishing **a type of hierarchy**, going from top to bottom. Back in the early 1950s the ministers under Mr. Armstrong were very eager to establish a hierarchy of authority, in which hierarchy they all featured right under Mr. Armstrong. And these are two of the verses they appealed to. But **these verses are not about a hierarchy of authority** in the Church!

Yes, there is and there must be authority within the Church of God. And that means that some people will have greater authority than other people, as far as the functioning of the Church is concerned.

But that is not what these two verses are talking about!

These verses present **a hierarchy of responsibilities!**

In other words, this hierarchy means that some responsibilities in the Church need to be given **a higher priority** than other functions in the Church. If there are any apostles in the Church, then the job God has given them must always receive the top priority. If there are no apostles, but there are some prophets in the Church, then the highest priority in the Church must be to enable those prophets to fulfill the job God has given them. That is what first and second means.

Now Peter and Paul were apostles, and Elijah was only a prophet. So does that mean that Peter and Paul had greater authority than the Prophet Elijah? No, of course not! The various responsibilities listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 have nothing to do with any positions of authority. Some prophets may well have more authority in God's Church (e.g. Moses and Elijah) than some apostles (e.g. Thomas, Andrew, Matthew, etc.).

Now the designations “apostles” and “prophets” both refer to such men delivering messages from God, with “prophecies” being a very specific

category of messages from God. And yes, when a man (i.e. either an apostle or a prophet) is given a message which God wants delivered, then that must always be given the highest priority within the Church of God.

To my knowledge God has not used any man as a “prophet” in this age (i.e. since the start of Mr. Armstrong's ministry about 100 years ago). And I myself am certainly not a prophet in the meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:28. And neither was Mr. Armstrong a prophet.

Now the word “prophet” is in different contexts also used to refer to **any minister** who is preaching the truth of God. And that is a valid meaning in our present age. But that is not the meaning for “prophet” that Paul had in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, because a number of the categories Paul mentions after “prophets” would also have included ordained ministers. And that would render the reference to “prophets” in this list somewhat meaningless. So Paul was thinking of prophets as men with the responsibilities which prophets had in Old Testament times, and also in very early New Testament times.

Now consider this:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and **how shall they hear without a preacher?** (Romans 10:14)

With this specific approach preaching first exposes new people to the truth. And once they have been exposed to the truth, **then they need correct teaching** to impart understanding to them. The preaching exposes people to the truth, and the teaching then provides understanding, building on what people had been exposed to. It is only once people know the truth that they become truly free from the shackles of this world’s false religious ideas.

And **you shall know the truth**, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

Before people can know the truth, they first have to be taught the truth. Therefore there must be men who can teach others the truth of God. And so in selecting other men for the ministry, Paul told Timothy the following:

A bishop (i.e. a minister) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, **apt to teach**; (1 Timothy 3:2)

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, **apt to teach**, patient, (2 Timothy 2:24)

If a man does not have **the aptitude** to actually teach the truth, and not just the ability to regurgitate without real understanding the things someone else taught him, **then he should not be ordained as a minister!** A man must be able to teach the truth of God **before** he is actually ordained as a minister. Teaching the truth of God is the foremost responsibility of the ministry (#3 in Paul’s hierarchy). That is what Paul told Timothy. The other requirements for a minister apply to **what the man is like**. But “apt to teach” refers to **an ability** that the man does or does not have.

Ordination into the ministry doesn’t somehow give a man a new way of communicating the truth of God

to other people. If a man didn't have **the ability** to teach the truth to others before he was ordained, then he also will not have that ability to teach others after he is ordained.

In the past 60+ years we have had far too many cases of men being ordained into the ministry because they had been faithful Church members for many years. Ordination was recognition for a man, it was a reward. The fact that the man **did not have the ability to teach God's truth** to other people was unfortunately never a consideration in very many cases.

That practice created huge problems!

Instead of preaching from personal convictions and personal understanding, many of those men were willing to teach **whatever they were told to teach**, by an administration that had rejected obedience to God's laws. Every minister back in the 1980s and 90s, who was willing to preach the changed teachings he was told to preach, was showing that he didn't really have the ability to teach the truth of God. And since he was not "apt to teach", therefore **he should never have been ordained** into the ministry in the first place! His ordination was based on a totally false foundation.

When men who are not really "apt to teach" do the teaching, then that creates massive problems. As God tells us through the Prophet Jeremiah:

My people have been lost sheep: **their shepherds have caused them to go astray**, they have turned them away *on* the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place. (Jeremiah 50:6)

These men ("the shepherds") who should never have been in the ministry of God's Church caused thousands of God's people to go astray. They did this by setting **bad examples** (that's back to Matthew 5:19) and by **actively teaching** the things they were told to teach. Bad examples in this age have a very powerful effect, causing other people to copy those bad examples, like starting a chain reaction. And so God's people were scattered by the false ministers. That's where we are today.

To get back to teaching and preaching.

Another way to recognize the differences between teaching and preaching is to view doing **Bible Studies** as **teaching**, and **giving sermons** as **preaching**.

The Church of God custom for Bible Studies is to go verse-by-verse through specific books of the Bible. In this activity the Bible itself determines the sequence of statements that are examined, because we proceed from the first verse in the first chapter methodically to the last verse in the last chapter of a specific book of the Bible. The goal is always to make clear the intended meaning of verse after verse. This is teaching with a certain amount of questions and answers in this activity. **Bible Studies are teaching activities.**

For sermons the speakers themselves look for a specific subject, and then they gather all the relevant material around the subject they have selected. Sermons are basically **lectures** on subjects the speakers have selected. So **giving sermons is a preaching activity**, preaching being a very specific form of teaching.

Both activities are important in the context of God's Church. But they have a slightly different focus.

Both teaching and preaching present information to the hearers. But this only represents the first part of **the information transfer process**. To successfully complete this process of giving information to the hearers, it requires **another step**. And that step involves **the hearers**.

Now we come to the free will of every human being. Now we have to make our own decisions for the teaching and preaching we get to hear. What do we do with the information that has been presented to us? How do we respond? Do we in our minds accept and deal with the information we have heard? Or do our minds reject the things we have heard? Or do we not even understand the information we have heard?

This brings us to the parable of the sower sowing the seed in Matthew 13.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

This is a well-known parable with which all of us are reasonably familiar. I have discussed it at length in a different article. So we can skip many of the details from this parable.

The seed that is sown represents **the teaching and preaching** to which we are exposed by God's Church. In Jesus Christ's words, the seed involves people "**hearing**" the word of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13:19). And here "hearing" refers to the teaching and preaching which we get to hear.

So teaching and preaching reaches the minds of people. And in so doing, the teaching and preaching is confronted by **four different minds**. Each mind is represented by **different soil conditions**. Those four different soil conditions are:

- 1) Soil by the wayside, which soil is hard like a footpath.
- 2) A very rocky, stony area with only a very small amount of actual soil.
- 3) Soil that is full of weeds and thorns.
- 4) Very fertile soil.

Now in the parable these four different soil conditions are predetermined. One section is by the wayside, and the wayside cannot change itself. Likewise the rocky area is rocky, and also is not capable of changing itself. The different soil conditions simply are what they are, and we cannot change that. As the

parable is presented, we have no control over the weeds being in one patch, and over many rocks being in another patch.

However, in the actual application of this parable **we have 100% complete control** over the soil conditions. We ourselves determine how our minds will respond to the teaching and preaching we are exposed to.

So when the soil in our minds is like **the wayside**, then **that is our own doing**. We ourselves have created soil that refuses to accept the seeds of truth. The soil in our minds need not have been soil by the wayside, but we ourselves made it so. We make the soil in our minds like soil by the wayside **by the way we respond** to teaching and preaching. Therefore people in this category have to assume full responsibility for not ever in this age becoming a part of God's Church. See Matthew 13:4. We ourselves allow "the birds" to come and take away the seeds to which we had been exposed. Nobody is predestined to be nothing more than "the seed by the wayside".

When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and **understands it not**, then comes the wicked *one*, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. (Matthew 13:19)

When these people hear the teaching and the preaching, they don't understand. In very many cases this means that **they don't put out the effort to understand**. They lack the motivation to seek understanding. It is not that they couldn't understand, if they were motivated to seek such understanding. But they are just not motivated. Or in modern terms, they are simply **not interested** in the truth of God.

Then there is the person whose mind is like soil full of rocks and stones. That condition is also not God's doing. That condition is due entirely to those people themselves. They themselves have created a stony soil in their minds.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word, and immediately with joy receives it. **Yet has he not root in himself**, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by **he is offended**. (Matthew 13:20-21)

The statement "he has not root in himself" shows that **he himself is responsible** for not having any real roots. The teaching and preaching to which this individual was exposed made an impression on him. He saw the logic in what he had heard, and initially he accepted that teaching and preaching as God's truth.

But he accepted the truth without actually considering the price he would be called on to pay for accepting God's truth. So once close relatives, or the employer, or his community in general, put some serious pressure on him, then he gets upset and becomes offended at the Church. Then he sees the Church of God as the cause of all of his problems.

But this is how his own mind functions and reasons. He himself is responsible for the stony soil in his mind. He used his own free will to create that stony soil.

Now the person who receives the seed amongst thorns also recognizes the logic and the truth in the teaching and preaching to which he has been exposed. And while there is plenty of potentially good soil in his mind, he is covetous and wants more of the so-called “good things” of this present life. Money is very important to this person.

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word; and **the care of this world**, and **the deceitfulness of riches**, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

One important lesson for us here is that if we are covetous, we are likely to create thorns in our own minds, thorns that will try to eject God's truth from our minds, or in the words of the parable, “choke out the truth”.

Another important thing to note here:

This individual does not necessarily stop keeping God's laws! Did you know that? He may still keep God's laws. But that keeping of God's laws will be “**unfruitful**”, meaning it will be of **no value**. He may mechanically keep God's laws, but his heart will not really be in it. He's like the individuals who can't wait for the Sabbath to end, so they can get back to making more money.

Saying, **When will the new moon be gone**, that we may sell corn? **and the Sabbath**, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? (Amos 8:5)

These people don't care about anything other than making more money. And if such covetous people are exposed to the teaching of the truth, then they are likely to become like those who receive the seed amongst thorns.

They don't necessarily become offended, like those on stony ground, because in many cases they already have more physical goods than they need. They are just quietly choked to death by their desire for more money. They just fade out of the picture.

And then there are also those people who receive the teaching and preaching into “good ground”.

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that **hears** the word, **and understands it**, which also **bears fruit**, and brings forth, some an 100-fold, some 60-fold, some 30-fold. (Matthew 13:23)

Now these individuals are not smarter than the other categories. But they use their minds differently. They hear the same teaching and preaching the other groups hear, but they respond differently. Specifically, they do not allow personal needs or wants or social pressures to influence their judgment. They accept the teaching of the truth, and then **put it into practice in their lives**. That is what enables them to produce fruit.

So we have the two steps for learning God's truth, for becoming a true Christian.

Step #1 is that we are **exposed to** teaching and preaching by a servant of God. We ourselves have no control over this step. And obviously, over the past approximately 2000 years very many people around the world never at any time in their lives had any access to the truth of God. They were never exposed to teaching or preaching from a servant of God. They were never exposed to God's "seed".

Step #2 depends on us ourselves, and with "us" I am referring to all the people over the past two millennia, who have had the opportunity of hearing the teaching or preaching of a true servant of God. For us it then depends on what we do with the information we have heard. And we ourselves have the full power to decide what type of "soil" we will provide in our minds for the seed of God's truth to take root.

We are not predestined to have any of the three bad types of soil conditions in our minds. We ourselves determine whether or not we are prepared to:

1) **Work hard** to loosen up the soil in our minds so that our minds don't resemble soil "by the wayside". We study to check up on what we have heard, and then we hold fast to what we have proved to be true.

2) **Throw out** any and all rocks that prevent us from establishing deep roots. We commit ourselves to applying in our own lives all the teachings we prove to be true.

3) **Pull out** all the thorns and other weeds that we can see in our own minds. We guard our minds against coveting wealth, and we develop faith in God by relying on God to help us with all our tests and trials. We look to God to help us grow in understanding.

When we do these things, then we will in effect be preparing **good ground** in our minds. We will be equipped to live Christianity, and to bear much fruit.

And then the teaching and preaching of God's servants will be bearing fruit in our lives. And we can have the faith that God will give us all the help we need in order to hold fast to the calling we received from God.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

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