



What is the difference between preaching and teaching? Is there a time or place where one should be more emphasized over the other?

Broadly speaking, 'preaching' is all about 'proclamation.' It consists of opening up Scripture and revealing who God is and what He has done, especially emphasizing what He has done through Jesus to redeem the world. 'Preaching' then is essentially 'proclaiming' the good news of the Kingdom of God.

'Teaching' on the other hand is all about the 'implications.' What does it mean to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God? If we have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ, how then shall we live? Teaching helps us to apply and work through all the details that preaching proclaims.

The Bible sometimes refers to 'preaching' and 'teaching' as separate activities,ⁱ but in practice, the lines between them get blurred.ⁱⁱ For that reason, I think it's most helpful to think of preaching and teaching as two ends of the same spectrum. In many ways, they overlap, but there are certain things that tend to be more true at either end of the line. For example:

Preaching

Teaching

*tends to proclaim the Gospel (the problem of sin and redemptive plan of God)

*tends to explore and apply the details of the Gospel

*tends to be more heart focused

*tends to be more head focused

*tends to be more relational

*tends to be more informative

*tends to aim more for unbelievers and newer believers

*tends to aim more for more mature believers

*tends to happen in larger groups

*tends to happen in smaller groups

As you can see, the differences are really nuances. Good teaching must proclaim the redemptive work of God and good preaching has to help people to think about the implications of the Gospel. Preaching and teaching are integrally related so that I think it's probably best to situate any given message on a spectrum ranging from 'preaching' to 'teaching,' rather than labelling it as one specific kind of message.

That being said, a Sunday morning sermon is usually closer to the preaching end while Bible studies skew more towards the teaching end. 'Bring a friend' sermons will be closer to preaching as they anticipate a less committed audience, but Qs from the pews lean heavily in the direction of teaching, given that they are coming from more mature believers. Even so, I want to proclaim the Gospel in a way that helps new people come to faith and apply it to life (like teaching) and address Qs from the pews in light of the Cross (like preaching).

The difference between preaching and teaching is really one of nuance. They are two ends of the same spectrum and any good message or study will lean towards one end while incorporating aspects of the other. Despite any differences though, preaching and teaching both have the same goal – to help people to know God and grow in their relationship with Him!

Graham Gladstone
Langford Community Church 2023

ⁱ For example, Matthew lists them as unique aspects of Jesus' ministry: *23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, [1] teaching in their synagogues, [2] preaching the good news of the kingdom, and [3] healing every disease and sickness among the people* (Matthew 4:23, repeated in Matthew 9:35 and Matthew 11:1. See also Luke 20:1). 1 Timothy 4:13 is similar. Paul reminds Timothy to apply himself to three different aspects of ministry: *13 Until I come, devote yourself to [1] the public reading of Scripture, to [2] preaching and to [3] teaching* (numbers added).

ⁱⁱ For example, Luke 4:15-16 tells us that Jesus had a practice of 'teaching' in synagogues and that on one particular Sabbath, He went to do 'as was His custom,' ie., to teach. The content of His 'teaching' though was textbook 'proclamation.' He opened up the Scriptures to Isaiah and through Isaiah, He 'preached' good news to the poor and 'proclaimed' freedom for the prisoners (vss. 18-19). This proclamation of Good News came in the context of 'teaching,' blurring the lines between the two.