

The Teaching Ministry of the Local Church

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And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried

about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Ephesians 4:11-14)

When an individual comes to the saving knowledge of Christ, they are like a new-born baby who must grow to maturity. The New Testament speaks of this growth and maturing often (E.g. Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 1:28, 1 Peter 2:2), but the apostle Paul speaks of this in terms of “learning Christ” (In Ephesians 4:20-21). This begins when we come to faith, but it doesn’t stop there. Learning Christ isn’t an event. It is a lifelong process.

A Christian, then, is a “disciple,” one who is under the discipline of Christ, to learn from Him, and then to go out and live for Him.

So, how does a Christian “learn Christ”?

The Bible emphasises the teaching of the local church as the God-ordained means of Christian growth, and God has gifted the church with pastors and teachers for this purpose (Ephesians 4:11). The pastor must be able to shepherd the flock and to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). But he must first be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:24). It is important to underscore this in a culture where the teaching ministry receives the least attention.

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The Priority of Teaching

In his preaching and teaching ministry, the pastor instructs the people in the word of God. This involves explaining, expounding, expositing the meaning of the Word of God, and applying it to their spiritual, moral, and practical life. All these words (with the prefix ex, “out of,” “from”) indicate that in teaching, the pastor brings out the meaning of the biblical text. Preaching however, is more than instructing the people. Preaching demands a response.

Think of this in three words: revelation, relevance, and response.

Or you can ask three simple questions: What is God saying? Why is He saying it? What does He want us to do?

The Purpose of Teaching

This brings us to the purpose of teaching. As I've said it is more than mere instruction. The pastor wants to accomplish something by his teaching. Let's consider a threefold purpose of the teaching ministry in any local church.

1. Growth

Christianity is living relationship. The apostle uses the picture of living things, like animals and plants and growth as an indicator of life and growth. The Christian is to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

2. Grounding

In Ephesians 4:14 the apostle uses another picture to describe the Christian experience. It is a picture of a ship that is being storm-tossed about

by “waves” and “wind.” His point here is that Christians are vulnerable to deceptive and crafty teachings as ships are to the waves and wind on a stormy sea. The Christian needs something to ground him, like an anchor, and that anchor is provided by God—“pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).

Christians are vulnerable to deceptive and crafty teachings.

3. Guidance

The Psalmist speaks of the Word as a lamp and a light for the traveller in the darkness of the night (Psalm 119:105). How will the Christian living in this dark world, make decisions in life? How will he have a marriage that glorifies Christ, build a home, bring up children in the instruction of the Lord or relate to an unbelieving boss? All of these must be addressed diligently from the pulpit and

God's word must be opened,
expounded, and applied to the life of
the believer. Brethren, this is our job as
pastors and teachers.