



The Shepherd's Instruction, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Point two: The chosen agents of instruction. The chosen agents of instruction. God answers the constant need for instruction to his people by supplying the church of Jesus Christ with chosen agents to give them biblical instruction. We could go several places, but I would just call your attention to a verse or a chapter that we have looked at a lot in our church and it's Ephesians chapter 4.

Ephesians chapter 4, starting in verse 11, "Christ gave some as Apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ." And on it goes. The time of the Apostles and prophets came to an end at the end of the first century, at the end of what we call the Apostolic age. The product of their ministry, the Canon of the New Testament was complete at that time, when John put his pen down at the end of Revelation 22.

The ministry of the evangelists, pastors, and teachers is to take that Apostolic prophetic truth in the New Testament and the entire Word of God, all that's inspired by God the Spirit, infallibly written in the New Testament by men, superintended by the Spirit in the original autographs, those choice agents, the evangelist, pastors, and teachers, they proclaim the truth by preaching and teaching. These agents of instruction, chosen agents of God, evangelist, pastors, and teachers, chosen servants of Christ, are set apart, called to this special work, equipped by the Spirit with gifts suited to the work qualified by God's grace. According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, recognized as called, as gifted, qualified by the church, recognized by the church, so that they then are ordained and deployed by the elders of the church.

Says in this Titus chapter 1, these qualifications are as follows; for this reason, Paul tells Titus, "I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Note, in every city, plurality of elders. "Namely, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, who are not accused of dissipation, or rebellion. For the overseer must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick

tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious." That is, he likes to come to blows, he likes to fight.

"Not fond of dishonest gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those who contradict." That last verse, in particular, kind of gives insight into why God has chosen men as agents of instruction and not women. It's because of this, not only the teaching instruction role, kind of the demand for abstract thought, a preference for abstract thought, but also this exhortative role that makes relationships second to purity, and holiness, and principle.

It's 1 Timothy 2:12 to 14, God lays out the reason for choice of men for this office, for this role. He goes back to the created order and says it's because of the order of creation and it's because of the wisdom of design where God distinguished them male from female. There's no time right now to develop the thought, but it's just vital that public instruction of Scripture and doctrine and all the exhortation from the public, from the pulpit, from the teaching venues come from men, not women.

No matter what cultural winds are blowing, no matter who that offends, we must not offend the God who gave us the Word, that's primary. We sympathize with him and his interests, not the culture. And believe me, those cultural winds enter into the lungs of men and women in the church. They enter into our church still blowing out these cultural winds. They may even agree in principle, say, yeah, men preachers, get it. But sometimes they can resist the practice, and sometimes verbally, sometimes quite demonstrably.

At one point during a time of potential discouragement for Timothy, Paul reminded Timothy that he is a chosen agent of divine instruction for the church. 1 Timothy 4:14 Paul tells Timothy, "Don't neglect the gift within you which was given to you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the council of elders." And what was the ordained for verse 13 previous verse, "until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture." The reading in that time came with explanation as well. So we're talking about an expository ministry.

Give attention to public reading of Scripture or an expository ministry, to exhortation and to teaching. Why? So people can learn the truth and obey it, so they can be sound

worshippers of God. Paul tells Timothy in verse 15 that though he's been given a gift, he has a stewardship of that gift. He's responsible to develop it. He tells Timothy, "Take pains with these things, be absorbed in them so your progress will be evident to all."

The gift of preaching and teaching, it has to be developed, like any natural gift or talent that you have, it has to be developed, otherwise it, it sits dormant. It has to be trained, and educated, and advanced by study, and reading, and meditation, and then by constant practice. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent, Timothy, to present yourselves approved to God as a workman who need not be ashamed." Why? Because "you're accurately handling the word of truth."

Interesting in that verse, Paul uses a verb that kind of reminds us of his role, his secular role as a tent maker. He uses a term that calls about cutting it straight. Cut the word of God straight. Be accurate. Pastors are to be lifelong learners, students. They're students of language, ancient language, dead languages. At the very least, they should be competent in Hebrew and Greek. And then even as they advance further, they advance into Latin, which sadly has gone by the wayside. Used to be taught in schools all the time.

I've gone back to school, as you guys know, and there's just a, a lament at the postgraduate level at how Latin's been tossed by the wayside. So now in my 50s, I got to learn in Latin. Do you believe this? Learning reformation languages, languages on the continent of Europe. All so we can read in the original primary sources, read in those texts so we can be good students. Knowing languages and understanding those things brings us into lexicography and grammar and syntax. Basic tools, but vital for exegesis, for doing history appropriately according to a good methodology for doing theology.

We're students of history. We reach back into history. We learn about warfare, politics, international relations, commerce, economics, empire, nations, socio cultural settings, factors that lead to changes among peoples and among societies. We learn about botany. We learn about food. We learn about customs, habits. We're students of people, whether it's people grouped into tribes, tongues, and nations, or people in families, people as individuals.

We're students of our own hearts first, knowing what leads to sin or to righteousness. Understanding the word by the word, the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Knowing both mortification and vivification. What leads to what we need to

kill in our lives and what needs to come alive and fuel our studies for ourselves and for others.

As students of God in Christ, we're always pressing further into deep communion with the Triune God, which is a confrontation all the time, his purity and holiness with our sinfulness. And we're on our knees all the time confessing sins, seeing our weakness, seeing our need, crying out to him for help, to worship him, just to worship him rightly, in spirit and in truth; worshipping him in the excellence of each of his divine persons.

Michael Allen says, quote, "Theology is hard intellectual work." Man that's true. He goes on and says, "It demands not only intellectual but also moral and theological virtues for good execution." He goes on to say, "Theology involves self-denial, counter man's idolatry and thus needs wholehearted spiritual commitment." End quote. Man, that is true. And I beg God for the help and the grace and the strength just to exercise my mind every time I turn my attention to the Word of God and to reading.

Just reading, and study, and theology, and doctrine, which is why the pastor is always at war with his own heart to mortify the flesh, to put aside distractions and to be gentle with

others in doing so. Not to be this holier than thou pious monk walking around as if he's above everybody else, but no, acknowledging he struggles with everything that they do, as he fans into a white hot flame the gifts that God gave him, so he can burn brightly in loving God with all of his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. May God help us.

Charles Bridges says, "The minister's life must be a life of holy meditation and study. No man who neglects the Apostles exhortation to give attention to reading will long continue a profitable preaching to an intelligent congregation. The native resources, even of the most powerful minds, need to be replenished. Therefore, the preacher must not merely have been a man of reading. He must read still, or his sermons will be trite and barren of thought." End Quote.

Trite and barren of thought, that is exactly what describes many of the so-called pulpits in this country and men who are of the other sort, who are constantly repenting and pursuing knowledge of the Holy to understand God, to understand themselves before God, to understand people, to understand the work. Men like that, in a constant lifelong pursuit of learning, are Christ chosen servants for your instruction beloved, for the

glory of God, in service to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastors and shepherds strive to be biblical, doctrinal, theological scholars, to know and love God, to love God's people; preaching and teaching the truth. So we see the need for instruction, how God meets the need through these chosen agents who are themselves students, always learning. Here's a Third Point: The common source of instruction. Common source of instruction. And I've already been hinting at this, so I'll keep this brief. The common source of our instruction is the Word of God, Holy Scripture, the Holy Bible. And I call Scripture common, a common source, not to denigrate, spritz, Scripture or to make it less than holy, but rather because the Holy Bible is the authority that is common to us all.

When I preach from the Word, you can open up your copy of God's Word and check my work. That's what you're to be doing. You'd be looking at your Bible and say, does that line up? Not, not, in a critical way, but just to say, does that line up? How am I understanding? Am I following his train of thought? This is why Jesus explained himself commonly in his ministry, explained himself, explained his teaching, often by going back and citing, and explaining Scripture.

He was not some maverick, just, here's a new way, reject the Scripture of the Old Testament because it's insufficient and follow me now. No! He said, everything I'm doing is in continuity with everything God's always said; it's your teachers. You've heard them say, but I say to you, you've heard them teach, but I say to you, here's the truth of those texts. He was demonstrating continuity between his ministry and the Old Testament, showing the imprimatur or the approval of God and God's authority on his ministry.

One illustration suffices, remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures. You ever thought about why he did that? I mean, by the authority of his person, he being in the body of his resurrection, couldn't he have just proclaimed to them, look at me, I was dead, I'm alive, listen to everything I'm saying. He could have done that. It would have been totally righteous, totally appropriate.

He takes them to the Scriptures. In like manner, preaching of the Apostles in the early church in the book of Acts, expositing texts from what we now call the Old Testament. Paul did the same thing during his ministry, as we see clearly in

Acts 20:27. He says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." I'm among those who thinks that the book of Hebrews is Paul's preaching sermonic material, probably penned by the writer Luke. That's my view. You could take me to task if you want to, another time. But I do think it's Paul's work and, it's, Hebrews is so rich in the Old Testament, isn't it? It's beautiful, beautiful Greek language, which shows Luke's hand, I think, the excellence of his Greek writing.

But it is Paul's thought, even if he didn't write the book of Hebrews or isn't the mind or the, the, sermonic material behind the book of Hebrews. Look at how he teaches. He is a scriptural thinker, and so he says, "I didn't shrink from declaring to the whole purpose of God? Other translations render that, *ta boulē*, the whole council of God, the whole council of God, the whole purpose of God, which is revealed and unveiled in the Scripture.

Two, two Testaments of Scripture, what Paul calls the sacred writings. This power in this word has a power to affect regeneration. 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul told Timothy, "From childhood you've known the sacred writings which are able to give the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ." God's word is the only source of instruction with the

power to save sinners from eternal hell and to sanctify them with transforming power, to change that life from what it was to what God intends it to be, like Christ.

Paul says, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, "All Scripture," Old and New Testaments, "inspired by God, profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate." That word, adequate, doesn't mean, just so, so; *artios*, means capable, fully ready, totally fit, perfectly fit, equipped for every good work.

So use it, he says, 2 Timothy 4, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearance in his kingdom." And he loads it up, doesn't he? Here's my solemn charge, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, wanting to have their ears tickled. They'll accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and they will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry." Amen.

More to say. We'll go to a fourth point, number four: The comprehensive scope of instruction. The comprehensive scope of instruction. Back to Acts 20, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders as he commends them to God in his grace. He says in verse 20, "I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house." Public instruction, house to house instruction, equals comprehensive instruction.

Paul's example sets a pattern for pastors and teachers in the local church to provide comprehensive instruction in a common source, the whole council of God with a, com, comprehensive scope, or you might say several scopes. First, as I said, the comprehensive scope of venue, but also format. There's public and private instruction. There's the regular ministry, the Word from the pulpit, public and formal instruction of scripture delivered through preaching and teaching to the gathered church. That's one venue, one format.

But there's also the occasional ministry of the Word, provided as a need arises, whether in formal instruction of discipleship or counselling, or the more informal instruction of the same. This instruction comes in a more private setting, informally, from house to house, in homes along the way, and

coffee shops, and Panera Bread, and offices, driving from place to place in a car. Public instruction, formal instruction, and private informal instruction. Comprehensive. That's about the scope of venue, the format of teaching.

Second, there's a comprehensive scope in the kind of content as well. Pastors and teachers that have preached the Scripture, but they also need to teach the doctrines of Scripture, the theology of Scripture. That's, there's preaching passages of Scripture. There's also the teaching of its doctrines. Paul distinguishes doctrinal kind of instruction from preaching kind of instruction; technically preaching called the kerygmatic proclamation. He distinguishes doctrinal instruction from preaching in several places in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul calls Timothy to instruct, exhort the Christians in Ephesus and by so doing, he'd be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith, the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you've been following.

So doctrinal instruction, a body of truth that is recognized as authoritative; summaries of doctrinal truth, like we just recited this morning in the Apostles Creed. Paul returns to the authoritative nature of this doctrinal theological instruction several verses later. If anyone advocates a

different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, doctrinal content, theological explanation, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing.

That's why it's essential for an elder, part of his qualification prior to being ordained, that he's mature enough, sufficiently equipped and trained not only to handle texts of Scripture and preaching and teaching, but the doctrine theology of Scripture, so that Titus 1:9, "He can hold fast the faithful word and be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it." If you're going to refute, if you're going to correct, you got to know the truth. You got to know the doctrine of the truth.

Timothy also must, 2 Timothy 1:13, "Retain the standard of sound words which you heard from me." That word, standard, means an outline that delineates the boundaries of truth. It's a prototype against which all words and doctrine teaching are measured. So comprehensive scope of instruction applies to venue and format; the kind of instruction doctrine, preaching, theology.

Finally, the goal of instructions' comprehensive too, from start to finish of the life. Paul tells Timothy, 1 Timothy 1:5,

a verse you know. "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith." That points to a long-term goal of living by Christian wisdom, making advances in practical living and Christian maturity. The goal is love from a pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith equals mature Christian, grown up Christian.

So the shepherd's instruction, public and private, biblical, doctrinal, theological instruction is both elementary, imparting knowledge of the truth and advanced growth into wisdom by practicing of the truth. Why is it that there's all this emphasis on the truth? Why is it that God has specially chosen servants given to his body and they're few in number, as James 3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren." Just a few chosen for his churches.

Why is it that he dedicates certain lives to this particular task? That'll be a lifelong task, that they will burn themselves out in the doing of it; in order to pour into other people in the church, to give them this truth. Because the Word of God has power, doesn't it? My word, your word, the books we read, fiction books, movies, podcast, no power; ultimately no change. What is it that has power to save the Sinner from eternal damnation? What has power to transfer the Sinner from

the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son? What has power to transfer a person from darkness to light, from error to truth, from unrighteousness, wickedness, and sin into righteousness, and purity, and holiness? There's only one word that has that power, only one word.

God says of his Word, he says, Is not my word like a fire? Is it not like a hammer which shatters the rock. In judgement, the Word scorches, burns away all that's false in the proud sinner. Which is why when sometimes people who profess Christ start feeling the heat, they pull away. The Word of God is like a hammer that crushes and pulverizes, the liar in his lies, the hypocrite in his hypocrisy, the rebel in his rebellion.

But for the humble believer, for the obedient penitent, the Word of God is implanted by the Spirit of God in the heart. It's able to save the soul, James 1:21. "The word is the power of God to those who are being saved," 1 Corinthians 1:18. It's no dead letter, but Hebrews 4:12, It's a living word, alive, productive. It's also active, effective, transformative.

God's Word has power, called the heavens and the earth into existence. It created all that we see and know. And that's why Jesus Christ himself is called the living and incarnate Word, because he has power. God's Word has the power, the only power

to save sinners, to sanctify them till they conform to the image of his beloved son. And that is why the shepherds instruct the flock.

That is why the pastors and the teachers equip the saints for the work of ministry, to do their work, that they are assigned by God, which is the ministry in and through the local church. Pastors and shepherds are preeminent slaves of Christ, setting an example for the rest of the slaves of Christ in the flock of God. Beloved, you're not your own. None of you who names the name of Christ is your own. You're bought with a price. You're bought with precious blood. Therefore, glorify God in your life, and with your body, and with your words, and with your eyes, with your hands, and your feet, with your mind, and learn.

In a few minutes, we're gonna come to the communion table and partake of the Lord's Supper together. In a view of that, I want to give you a list of questions that you can ask yourself so that you can do some self-examination before you partake of this fellowship ordinance laid before you. Hopefully these questions will help you to identify and then confess any sin that God brings to your mind. Repent of any ways that you have despised the truth subtly maybe, just by neglect, by

indifference or maybe outward rebellion; any way that you have despised the shepherd's ministry of instruction.

This is going to help you reflect on that, confess it, repent of it, but also to think about what God has given you in dedicated people who are dedicated to your good, and your instruction, and your growth, and your maturity, dedicated to your joy. So use this time, also these questions, also to think about the gift of shepherds, and pastors, and elders, and teachers, and evangelists to help you grow in sanctification. Let it be an occasion for you, for joy and gratitude.

Here's some questions for you. Number one: Do you fear the Lord? Basic question. Do you revere his Word? And do you respect and honor the servants of the word? Number two: Have you treated God's Word as holy, regarding it as the highest priority in your life? Does your attendance at church, and your attention in church, and your preparation for church, give evidence that you regard Scripture as holy?

Number three: Have you regarded your shepherds as gifts of God's grace to instruct you in the Word of God? Do you regard God's choice of them, in particular, not just shepherds in general, but these particular shepherds, and esteem them very highly in love, for, 1 Thessalonians 5:13 because of their work?

Number four: Do you consider yourself in need of instruction? Are you a humble, dependent Christian, appreciating God's gifts of grace that come through your local church? Or are you proud, independent, arrogant, wise in your own eyes?

Number five: Do you recognize the power of sin in your heart, the power of sin that disorders your inner life? Do you practice regular, honest self-examination to discern how often your feelings are out in front and in control, hijacking your heart? Stealing away the prominence of your intellect that directs your will. Do you make a habitual practice to self-examine, check your emotions so that a well instructed mind is the priority? So that your will disciplines and directs your inner life, so that your emotions follow your mind and your will, instead of being out in front?

Number six: Do you see the church as a training center and the primary purpose of Sunday services, to worship God from the heart by learning and studying? Do you see sermons as targeting the intellect so the mind can inform the will and the affections and the emotions? And finally, number seven: Do you come to listen for the purpose of obeying the Lord of the Word? Do you seek knowledge for wisdom, that is, to imitate Christ by

practicing the truth? Or do you seek knowledge for intellectual stimulation? Just some intellectual ear tickling entertainment.

Beloved, as you ask and answer questions like those for yourself, some of those things may sting your conscience and that's why God has given Christ to come to him. As we think about him in the symbol of the bread and the wine come before his table, think about his sacrifice for our sins. But some of these questions you're going to answer in the affirmative that I do think rightly about the church, about the word. Let that hearten you, beloved, because that didn't come from you. That's a gift of God to you. Blessed are you because your eyes see, your ears hear, your heart understands.

Maybe you're like Peter. You failed at times, yes, but you cry out to the omniscience of God, and you say, Lord, you know all things. You know I love you, you know I love you. Take refuge and comfort in him. Give your heart fully to him and your mind. May all this help you reflect on your duty to submit to the Word and its instruction; leading you during our time of communion to confess, repent of any sinful thoughts, habits of thinking, and then to give thanks for God and his kindness to instruct our minds in the Word, because that is what results in

a heart that loves God, with all the heart, soul, strength and mind, and loves neighbor as self.

Our Father, we give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ and because of the inner working of the Holy Spirit. First to regenerate us and give us new life. Ears to hear your word, eyes to see the truth and see Christ as majestic and holy. A heart to understand the Word because of the spirits work to cause us to be born again to a living hope, to new life, to faith, and repentance in Christ. Give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Father, because you've given us life and truth, you've given us understanding. You have opened up your mind to us, the depths of your mind, and your understanding. All that you've prepared, that eye has not seen, nor ear has not heard, nor is the heart of man understood, but all that you've prepared for those who love you, you've revealed to us in Christ. We merely need to learn; to be instructed.

Pray, Father, that as we think about the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ symbolized in the bread and the cup, that we give attention to our souls and orient our lives for the rest of our lives to be good learners of truth, to receive instruction, to be humble learners so that we could be obedient



followers of Jesus Christ and share not only in the sufferings that may come, but the glory that's to follow. We thank you for this eternal life. This changes us from the inside out. Pray that you would help us in our time of reflection, confession, and gratitude, and praise in this time of the Lord's Table in Jesus name. Amen.