

Where Do I Fit?
APEST – Part V
The Teaching Gift
August 27, 2017

Call to Worship: Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-13 (NIV)

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 5:11-14 (NIV)

This morning is our last Sunday looking at the five-fold ministry of Jesus found in our Call to Worship this morning from Ephesians 4. Next Sunday we are going to begin a new series looking at Paul's letter to the Romans, the most theological book in the New Testament, if not the entire Bible, and perhaps with the exception of the Book of Revelation, probably the most challenging. I'm saving Revelation for just before I retire, or maybe just after, whenever that might be ☺ But we have spent quite a bit of time now focusing on topics or themes, and although we have tried to keep Scripture as the foundation of all our messages, topical sermons are not the same as preaching directly from a book of the Bible. So we want to slow ourselves down a little bit and let God speak to us through His Word. Each week the Scripture passage for the following Sunday will be in the bulletin and in the weekly e-mail. Our suggestion is that you read that passage during the week, even spend some time with it, maybe use it for your Sunday school class discussion or your discipleship groups as the primary Scripture to focus on, either from the previous week or the week coming up. The Bible tells us that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Even as Christians who spend a lot of time in God's Word, we have a hard time grasping the significance and power of it. Robert Mulholland writes in his book *Shaped by God's Word*, "The Word of God is the action of the presence, the purpose and the power of God in the midst of human life."

We are going to try and work our way through the Book of Romans in about 6 months, or maybe just a little longer, taking a break during the Advent and Christmas season, which is a pretty daunting task. We're trying to strike a balance between doing the book justice and not staying in one book for so long, that you start to lose interest. And for those of you who think six months is too long, let me remind you that Martin Lloyd-Jones, considered by many to have been one of the greatest preachers of the 20th century, spent 14 years doing his series on Romans. We're probably erroring on the side of not doing it justice and going through it too fast, but I am certainly no Martin Lloyd-Jones.

Which really is a good lead in to the last of the five-fold ministry of Jesus from Ephesians 4:11 – The ministry of teaching. So far we have looked at Apostle – the ones who forces us out of our comfort zone to go out, into the world, reminding us that we are all "sent" by God; the Prophet who challenges us when we stray from God's will for our lives as His people, and for the world; the Evangelist who shares the Good News of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ with people he or she encounters, almost on a daily basis; and last week Alex looked at the ministry of shepherding – which was never meant to be left just to pastors. I think we have many shepherds among us, some who are using the gift and some who could use it a little more.

Probably the most that we have among us are teachers. We have lots of teachers among us. We have a lot of professional teachers who teach in schools, we have a lot who teach here at church and we have some who do both.

But this morning, not taking anything away from all the teachers that we have that teach in public schools and the importance of that vocation outside the church, I want to focus on the teaching role in the church, a “Christian teacher.” Yes, technically one who is both a teacher and a Christian is a “Christian teacher,” even out in the secular world, but the reality is that he or she is limited on what he or she can share verbally about their faith in the public school setting, not to even mention teaching about their Christian faith. So, this morning we are going to focus mostly on the teaching role in the church.

Just like the other four ministry callings that Jesus fulfilled, the role of teacher was very important, maybe even most important, especially to his initial calling to the Jewish people. Being a teacher, or rabbi in Hebrew, was probably the highest calling one could have for the Jewish people, probably even more so than the Jewish priest. Rabbi was the position that they gave the most authority to. Not just anyone could be a rabbi.

Very early on in his life the Jewish people recognized that Jesus had the teaching gift. At the age of twelve after his parents went up to Jerusalem during the Feast of the Passover and they mistakenly left in the caravan of people without him, upon their return it says in the Gospel of Luke 2:46-47, “they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

Let’s be honest here, how many of you have or have had a 12-year-old boy? If you lost him for a while, what do you think your chances of finding him here at church or sitting at the feet of one of his teacher’s would be? That would have been the last place my parents would have found me when I was 12 years old! The story concludes in Luke 2:52 with these words, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature (meaning maturity) and in favor with God and man.”

Don’t you find it kind of odd that Jesus, who was God himself, could increase in those things in his bodily nature here on earth? If Jesus could increase in wisdom and maturity and favor with God during His time here on earth how about us?

We live in a Christian culture today which says, “God loves me just the way I am.” How often have you heard that? Is that really the truth? It’s one of those partial truths which prevents us from understanding the full truth. I am currently reading a great book entitled Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification by Sinclair Ferguson. It’s one of those that I am on my second or third highlighter. This was one of his thoughts that I came across at the beginning of this week as I was preparing for this morning’s message:

“The truth is that since the fall of Adam, God has loved only one person the way he or she is [that being Jesus]. We have lost sight of the fact that it is the way we are by nature that put Christ on the cross. The biblical perspective is quite different [than the world’s]. The biblical perspective is that God loves us despite the way we are!”

The real truth is that God doesn't want us to stay the way we are! We can be saved and still increase in favor with God. When I first became a Christian, had my born-again experience, at 40 years old, one quote from a book was very instrumental to me at the beginning of my Christian journey. The book was by Max Lucado entitled "Just like Jesus." The quote was, "God loves you the way you are, but He doesn't want you to stay there, He wants you to become more like Jesus." God's goal for all of us, which this whole passage from Ephesians is all about, is that we all become fully mature, becoming more and more like Jesus. Biblical teaching and learning is one of the most important ways we do that.

If you woke up tomorrow and for some reason Oak Grove wasn't here anymore and you had to look for a new church, what would you look for in the new church? What would be the most important? Would it be the music, the fellowship, or that the church is known for doing great things in the community or around the world? Or maybe because that's where all the cool people are going? Some of those are important things but not the most important. If the church is not founded on sound biblical teaching, the church is not the church that God calls us to be. When I listen to sermons or watch services on line, no matter how nice that service might be, if the preacher does not preach sound biblical sermons, it's not for me. Feel good sermons might be good for a while, but if that's the steady diet, you can guarantee that little transformation, especially lasting transformation will ever take place. The entire goal of Christian teaching and learning is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or to gain more information. The goal of Christian teaching and learning is to be being continually transformed into the image of Christ.

"Teacher" was one of the few words that Jesus approved the disciples to call him during his time here on earth. In John 13:13, he says to his disciples, "you call me 'teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am."

And then Jesus says in his great priestly prayer found in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Again, it is about a lot more than knowing as meaning knowledge or understanding. The Greek word used there, translated as know, means to be intimately connected with someone. It was the same word used meaning to have sexual relations with someone, as in a husband and wife.

Neil Cole, in his book Primal Fire, Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus, defines Christian teaching as, "facilitating the learning of others so that they know, do, and pass on to others relevant and meaningful truth." Truth meaning God's will and God's ways.

Again, it's not enough just to know for knowledge sake. It's what you do with that knowledge. The disciple James (1:22) wrote, "Do not deceive yourselves by merely listening to the word [or knowing the word], do what it says!"

Neil Cole says in the 21st century American church it is not more knowledge or more information we need, it is obedience: "We in the Western church are educated well beyond our obedience. More education is not the answer; we need more obedience." In Jesus' great commission the church is commanded to teach people not just to know, but to obey all that he commanded us."

James (3:1) also offers a warning to all those who desire to be Christian teachers, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” The interesting thing is that of the five ministry gifts that Jesus gives, the only one that the Bible offers a caution of as to the number, the Western church has the most of. But I think the opposite is true as well, if you have been given the teaching gift and you’re not using it to equip Christians for works of service and to build up the body of Christ, making mature disciples, that too displeases God.

A teacher teaches not only knowledge, a teacher teaches with his or her whole life, especially a Christian teacher. Paul, the teacher, warns Titus, the student in his letter to him, “show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity and sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Titus 2:7-8a ESV).

Christian teachers are not just those who teach from the pulpit, they are those who teach children, youth and adults Sunday school. Christian teachers are those who rightly teach their children the Christian faith.

A Christian teacher:

- Inspires growth and facilitates the learning of truth and a Kingdom of God lifestyle.
- Instructs, corrects and trains in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Effectively communicates God’s truth as revealed in Scripture and exposes false doctrine.
- Is a good learner – the best teachers are good learners. Christian teachers have an insatiable appetite for learning God’s truth.
- Loves to study and read books, especially the Bible.
- Equips others to teach others.

Shadow side to the ministry of Christian teaching:

- Many Christian teachers are black and white in their thinking.
- Many Christian teachers focus more on information instead of transformation – the goal is to make Christians, disciples of Jesus, not Pharisees.
- Many Christian teachers limit the other ways that God speaks to us today, other than through His written word – i.e. the Holy Spirit, dreams, visions, angels, other people, experiences, even occasionally God speaking directly.
- Can become insulated.
- Churches that are dominated by the teaching gift often lack evangelistic fervor and may also lack strong relationships among their members.
- Easy for the authority to shift from the word of God to the authority of the teacher.

We have become like the secular world and we emphasize degrees, published works, and academic credentials rather than the application of the word of God. A couple a weeks ago I mentioned that I met a pastor who saw his church grow from 180 – 18,000 people in 40 years of ministry after he decided to focus mostly on preaching and teaching the word of God. His highest degree earned, other than many honorary doctorates, was a bachelor’s degree from a Bible college.

The word of God is a Christian teacher's only necessary authority. Their authority comes from the word of God and not their position or any degree they might hold. The measure of truth is always God's word.

“The primary role of teachers in the church is to create a culture in which knowing and living divine truth are two of its distinguishing characteristics.” Neil Cole, Primal Fire

So, now you know about the teaching gift, as well as the other four primary ministry callings of Jesus: apostle, prophet, evangelist and shepherd. So, where do you fit?

On the back of your insert this morning is a diagram. The biggest circle represents your primary calling and the smallest circle the least. I don't think we have been given just one calling. If we are made in the image of God the Father, than like Jesus we have all of them inside of us but some are more pronounced than others. Up on the white board this morning is what I believe to be the giftedness that God has blessed me with. It has come after a lot of discernment and I am still not completely sure how the top three – Teacher, Shepherd and Prophet line up, but I am sure of the bottom two.

The first question you need to answer is where do you fit? What is your primary calling or callings? And the second question how are you using that calling from Jesus to equip others for ministry and building up the body of Christ? And finally, if the answer to question #1 is, “I don't know” and/or the answer to question #2 is “I am not,” then the third question is “why not?”

Because every Christian is responsible for, and going to be accountable to God for how we used the gifts that God has gifted us with during our time here on earth for His glory and for the building up of His Kingdom.

Let us Pray: