

Teaching in the NT

In order to for someone to “teach” in the Church he must be able to convey effectively the truth of Scripture in terms not only of what *is*, such as the doctrine of Scripture, the Trinity, Predestination, Creation, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Salvation, the Church, etc., but also of what *ought to be*, such as the content of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Fruit of the Spirit. The ultimate aim of the “teaching activity” is to present as much as possible a full-orbed biblical “Systematic theology” and an equally full-orbed biblical “Ethics.” Apart from the Gospel references to Christ in his capacity as Teacher (See Brosend, 93-94 for this), in the NT the teaching activity is entrusted to three categories of people.

(1) The NT points us to the teaching office. The office of pastor-teacher, overseer (bishop), or elder, is one and the same in Scripture (Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1,2; 5:17; Tit. 1:5,7; Heb. 13:17; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). They all “rule,” i.e. “manage,” “take care of,” the Church (Heb. 13:7), and are willing to die in the process (Acts 21:10-13; Phil. 2:20; 3:10). There may be a difference in function among the elders. One or two may be asked to shoulder the responsibility for the regular “teaching” (or preaching) ministry, but they all participate in the same office, as “ruling elders (1 Tim. 5:17). This emphasis, incidentally, precludes the formation of a hierarchical difference between the “one” and the “many” in the leadership. It also precludes some of the elders, in fact the majority (the “many”) from ever becoming mere “administrators.” They are all pastors-teachers! It has been suggested that the functional difference in the eldership should be construed as one between visionary and shepherding leaders. Technically, however, all pastor-teachers must shepherd (pastor!), and as leaders they all should be visionary (lofty goal oriented). Still, it should not come as a surprise, if one or more would be specifically gifted in visionary area. In short, while there is only one pastor-teacher office, there may be, in fact, there will be, God-given differences in both function and talent. The Church will do well to recognize these differences and position each elder where he can function best, and where his talents can do the most good.

(2) The NT speaks about the “gift of teaching” (Rom. 12:7b). Together with the gift of exhortation (Rom. 12:8a) it comes in Paul under the heading of “prophecy,” which in this context is forth-telling the Word of God (Rom. 12:6b). This is categorized by Peter as the speaking gift that sets forth “the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11a). In Peter this speaking gift must be distinguished from the service gift that takes action (1 Pet. 4:11b). The latter comes in view in the Pauline context under the heading of “service” as well (Rom. 12:7), and consist of “sharing” (Rom. 12:8b), “caring” (Rom. 12:8c), and “showing mercy” (Rom. 12:8d). This interpretation has Peter and Paul agree on the two main categories (speaking/service in Peter corresponding to prophecy/service in Paul), but has Paul subdivide “prophecy” in two sub-categories and “service” in three. This tapestry is suggested by the text itself. Prophecy and service are abstract nouns and indicate gift *areas*, while the other five gifts are presented in terms of *concrete individuals*, he who teaches, he who exhorts, he who shares, he who cares, and he who shows mercy. These are the *persons* who are found in, and make up, the two *areas*.

Frankly, this explanation makes eminent sense. It not only shows that Peter and Paul dovetail completely. It shows as well that Paul does not present a hodge-podge of ideas. The passage is coherent and its message transparent. In fact, the two sub-categories under prophecy exhibit a progressive development from teaching to exhorting, and the three sub-categories under service an intensifying development from sharing to caring to the display of mercy.

At any rate, while 1 Peter 4:10-11 only mentions the two main categories without going into the five sub-categories, it agrees with Romans 12:3-8 that in the internal ministry of the Church each Christian has received (only) one of the two main gifts. However, Paul adds that the thus gifted persons should not transgress the limits of their gifts by encroaching upon areas reserved for others (Rom. 12:3). At the same time he insists that they must develop their gifts to the limit (Rom. 12:6). The presence of speaking gifts appears to pave the way to the office of elder in the Church of Christ, the acting gifts to the office of deacon,¹ provided, of course, that the potential candidates

¹ See also Jay Adams, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 1999) on 1 Peter 4:10-11. It is interesting to note that within the office of the eldership, while all elders do, and should, have a speaking gift, some major in “teaching,” and others in “exhorting.” Similarly, within the confines of the office of deacon, some find their niche in sharing, others in caring, and again others in showing mercy. All are clearly selectively brilliant. They all, therefore, will shine in the darkness. But only when in their selective brilliance they stand shoulder to shoulder will the several brilliances form one concentrated beam of light, and truly light up the darkness. In other words, a teacher in the pastoral office needs an exhorter, and vice versa, an exhorter needs a teacher. They do complement each other in principle, and must complement each other in practice by giving way to each other’s brilliance. Similarly, the three types of gifts in the diaconal office complement and need each other as well, and must display the same pattern of “giving way” (See Rom. 12:3). Of course, this calls for self-denial, as well as sacrifice and submission in love and holiness (See **Topical Focus #15: One-and-Many Spheres and Authority Structures**)! However, until the Church is the “embodiment” of the Cosmic Christ (Col. 1:15-19) in a combination of sacrificial and sanctifying service (Eph. 5:25-26), this will prove to be elusive. Incidentally, the same fundamental principles apply to the relationship the evangelist, pastor-teacher, and deacon sustain to each other. Redemptively they are all selectively brilliant. The brilliance gives all of them a godly swagger, and its selective, limited, nature humility. In short, an evangelist who does not see that he desperately needs speakers (teachers and exhorters) and actors (folks who “share,” “care,” and “show mercy”) alongside of him, shoots himself in the foot. The same applies to pastor-teachers and deacons who think they can go it alone. All three officers either hang together, or, as the saying goes, they each hang separately. To make this crystal clear in a partial illustration, pertaining to Evangelists and Pastors-Teachers only, the Evangelists are the OBGYN’s, the midwives, whom God uses to bring Baby-Christians in the world. Without them the Pastor-Teachers have “nothing to do.” Their task, and privilege, is to provide the Baby-Christians with “milk” and eventually, when they have matured, with “solid food” (Heb. 5:12-14). Without Pastors-Exhorters, however, Christians will turn into anacondas who are fed their weekly Sunday “piglets,”

meet the qualifications laid down in 1 Timothy 2.

All these identified gifts, catalogued in two main headings and five sub-headings, are also explicit commands of God. There is ample evidence in the NT that all Christians must (learn to) teach, exhort, share, care and show mercy. However, it appears that the several gifts emerge only when they enter the “pressure cooker” or “boot camp” of systematic obedience. I had the privilege to see this happen in the Schools of Evangelism, Teaching/Preaching and Diaconal Services that I regularly conduct in Uganda. After seven to ten days of solid instruction in the morning participants are given the opportunity to “dive” into hands-on evangelism, a teaching/preaching practicum, or practical service opportunities in the afternoon and evening. This is followed by two weeks of an all day regimen of evangelism, teaching/preaching, or practical service. The exciting thing is, first, that in this “boot camp” the gifts “pop out,” at times “suddenly”

which they enjoy immensely, but subsequently digest in a state of (half) sleep until the next Sunday, when they return for another “piglet.” They direly need “Pastors-Exhorters,” *such as James*, to “step on their tail,” to “electrify” them, to move them, and make them fly like “eagles!” Pastor-Teachers without Exhorters are handicapped and will fatten up the Church, and in doing so cripple it. Of course, Pastor-Exhorters without Teachers are equally handicapped. They are a pain-in-the-neck of the Church and will create bewilderment, unless they focus upon giving arms and legs to the teachings that are gloriously laid out by skillful anointed Pastor-Teachers and are gladly (being) digested by an equally anointed appreciative audience. In doing so they are a “perfect fit,” and will be instrumental in turning the Church into a beehive of activity, into a lean, well-trained, disciplined, goal-conscious army on a victorious march, like Patton’s Third Army in World War II. According to the historian no American Army has marched so far and made so many captives in such a short time facing so many obstacles and slugging their way through so many impossible situations! In short, (1) a full-bodied ecclesiastical team of officers (gifted and ordained men) consists of three main categories, I. Evangelists, II. Speakers, and III, Deacons, or six sub-categories (I) 1. Evangelists, (II) 2. Teachers, 3. Exhorters, (III) 4. Sharers, 5. Caregivers, and 6. “Showers of mercy,” who stand shoulder to shoulder in the exercise of their respective offices in mutual appreciation and support. No one can function as a one tower suspension bridge, holding up the road deck and directing traffic at the same time. All lone rangers, especially the successful ones, invariably see their congregations sharply diminish or fall apart upon their departure or demise. Even the most capable “deputies” cannot stem the ebbtide. Trained and capable co-laboring co-leaders are the *sine qua non* for continuity and growth! Further (2), a full-bodied ecclesiastical team of lieutenants (men *and* women) consist of folks with evangelistic, teaching, exhorting, sharing, caring, and mercy gifts who stand shoulder to shoulder in the exercise of their respective gifts also in mutual appreciation and support. Then (3), with and through the gifted folk (the lieutenants) the supervising officers (the captains) will now train the total membership (the privates) in each of the six areas of evangelizing, teaching, exhorting, sharing, caring and showing mercy. This is not optional, since every one of the gifts, as I further show below, is also a command. In fact, it is precisely through the training of everyone (the privates) in every area that the gift of each member pops up, and through the popping up of the gift (the lieutenants) that the potential officers (the captains) are identified.

and “unexpectedly,” secondly, that the moment this occurs the participants experience their God-given “niche” for life, and, thirdly, that they become both Spirit-propelled (100% God) and self-propelled (100% man) and “virtually” unstoppable in the service of Christ and his Church in the area of their specific gift. From this time onward they thoroughly enjoy their gift *and the exercise thereof* as their comfort zone to such a point that they will adopt a motto, “if you do not use me, you will lose me!” This unmistakable identification and intense enjoyment of their gift is invaluable since it will enable the Church to position them strategically in its internal or external ministry, and eventually in the office that fits their gift, whether of evangelism (Evangelist), teaching/preaching (Pastor-Teacher) or serving (Deacon). This will enable the Church to end up and operate as an organized beehive. As has been mentioned already, the bearers of a specific office function as captains, the gifted people in their area as their lieutenants, and together they organize the members of the congregation as foot soldiers to do the “work of external and internal ministry” with a view to perfect godliness through the knowledge and fellowship of Christ (Eph. 4:13), and all this to the glory of God (1 Pet. 4:11). Frankly, too often individuals are miscast and put in positions or offices where they do not belong. This easily can result in torn churches and despairing individuals. Since God gives productivity according to gifts, the Church would do well never to elect or appoint anyone to a specific function unless the gift prerequisite for such function has been identified in order to avoid a potential blueprint for disaster. Since only the “pressure cooker,” or “boot camp,” of obedience, functioning as a high performance “microwave,” rather than a super slow “crockpot,” can bring out gifts, this has the added benefit that no individuals will be elected or appointed, who have proven themselves to be too lazy or too indifferent to identify their gift. In the end only Spirit- and self-propelled individuals will qualify. This will benefit the Church greatly! In addition to this, someone who is ignorant of his or her gift may not even have a gift because he or she is not a Christian. Think of the trouble that is avoided by barring such persons from influential positions in the body of Christ!

To avoid the confusion that is often in evidence in discussions in the gift area, the gifts in 1 Peter 4:10-11 and Romans 5:3-8 must be (sharply) differentiated from the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-30, and the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:10-11 and Philippians 1.

Ephesians and Philippians identify the officers in the church. Christ grants leaders. They are gift wrapped in heaven. Incidentally, because apostles and prophets who produce the inerrant word of God constitute the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), they are no longer with. Jesus breathed the Spirit of the inspiration of Scripture upon them in the Upper Room (John 20:22, as an extension of Mt. 16:19 and John 14:26; 16:7-13), and not upon anyone since. Hence the canon is closed, and no one may, nor can, claim to be on a par with them. Incidentally, the idea that Ephesians 4:11 teaches a fivefold office is thoroughly mistaken. The Greek indicates that Paul differentiates between four categories only, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-teachers.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 12 identify extra-ordinary gifts. While each one who has received one of these gifts must attribute his or her gift to the Holy Spirit and his empowerment (1 Cor. 12:46, 11), 1 Corinthians 12 does not indicate that everyone did,

indeed, receive one of the gifts mentioned. This is also implied by Paul when he urges the congregational members to desire the higher gifts of faith, hope, and above all love (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13). This is why I categorize them as extra-ordinary.

Finally, 1 Peter and Romans identify ordinary gifts. Every believer has received such gift as believer (Rom. 12:3; 1 Pet. 4:10). This is why I categorize these as ordinary. Further, every believer has received one gift, and one gift only (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Pet. 4:10). Because the ordinary gifts are also commands, every believer must be active in each of the five areas mentioned in Romans. In fact, through his obedience a believer has competence in all of them to one degree or another. This fivefold competence forms a skyline of sorts. Some are more sharply visible against the sky of service than others. But one of them is a skyscraper. This one is the specific gift. Believers must make sure that they do not transgress the limits of their gift and crowd others out of their assigned territory (Rom. 12:3). The body of the Church would become dysfunctional. In fact, thankfully it is not necessary to do so, since all gifts serve each other in one cooperative functional harmony (Rom. 12:4-5). To achieve this they naturally must utilize their gift to the limit (Rom. 12:6). This sets the stage for the last category, which is the ground floor of teaching!

(3) The NT insists that in one way or another all believers “teach” in their various capacities and functions in the Church of Christ (Heb. 5:12). In fact, this supplies the launching pad for both the teaching gift and the teaching office. Believers may be fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, etc. but somehow they are all “teachers.” By way of anecdote, an extreme introvert, known as a very private person, once was strongly encouraged by his pastor to take a more hands-on role in the training of his children. In his protest he hid behind his psychological make-up and temperament. The response of the pastor was swift and blunt. “The moment you decided to father a child, God promoted you to be a teacher. You simply have no choice but to execute your ‘teaching function’ as father.” Of course, the very fact that teaching conveys “the things that are” (Systematic Theology) and “the things that ought to be” (Ethics) entails that every teacher in whatever capacity should be thoroughly acquainted with (all) the truth of God’s Word! From that perspective every teacher is and always remains a learner!

All this is introductory to the question what James has in mind when he warns his readers not to crowd into teaching!