

My professor shared a quote I'll share with you, from Evagrius of Pontus, a late fourth-century monk: "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian."

Let that one soak in as we discover another dimension today of what it means to be a priesthood of believers. As I promised last week, today we will look at teaching. We're going to look first at teaching in a broad sense, and then second in a specific sense as a spiritual gift.

2 Tim. 2:21, 24

*2Ti 2:21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

*2Ti 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,*

Paul is writing about Christians in general as the Lord's servants, not about elders or any other type of leader specifically. In other words, all Christians should strive to serve God, and part of that service will include some type of teaching.

Heb. 5:12 reinforces this same idea.

*Heb 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,*

The author of Hebrews is also speaking in general to all Christians. His point is that all Christians ought to be teachers. Please understand that teaching does not have to be something formal or lengthy or intense or deep that happens in a group or classroom setting. It doesn't have to be that. Teaching can simply be helping a brother or sister in Christ understand something a little better, or helping an unbeliever understand the gospel a little better. As we experience the work of God in our lives, as we learn about him, as we mature in Christ we will have something to offer to others, something we can teach to others. If we don't, it's not because we lack the spiritual gift of teaching. This is not talking about spiritual gifts. What this verse is

bluntly saying is that if we don't have something to teach to others, it's because we are very immature Christians. Again, this does not require the spiritual gift of teaching; this verse is not set in the context of spiritual gifts. The gift of teaching is something specific; this is talking about teaching in a broad and basic sense. Maybe it would be helpful to compare this to prayer. Every Christian should pray. Some Christians are especially passionate about prayer, and spend more time in fervent prayer, and so we call them prayer warriors. In the same way, every Christian should be able to teach something about Christianity to someone else. Some Christians are especially passionate and gifted in teaching, and when they are called teachers it's referring to a more specific type of Christian service. We'll get to that in a few minutes.

In the NT church, teaching could come from any Christian who had a word of instruction for the church.

*1Co 14:26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.*

This verse teaches us that each person in the congregation of believers may have something to share that is edifying to others. This may include lessons or revelations. There is nothing wrong with someone being designated to teach or preach in the worship gathering; that's a good thing. But beyond that, any believer may share words of insight or encouragement. That is just one sense in which believers can act on the calling in Hebrews 5:12 to teach others.

Maybe to make this whole idea of teaching less daunting, there are a couple things I should point out. First of all, teaching can happen in a variety of settings and through a variety of relationships. It's really intended to be an everyday thing. Think about

*Deu 6:6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*

*Deu 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

Teaching the ways of God has been part of everyday life for the people of God since the Law of Moses was given. How much more now ought it to be part of our everyday lives in this age of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us and empowers us to teach? Take a look at

*1Jn 2:26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.*

*1Jn 2:27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.*

I bring this into the discussion because a misinterpretation of this verse can be misleading. John says ‘you have no need that anyone should teach you’. What he’s talking about is these people who were trying to deceive the early church. They were called Gnostics, and they believed that the only way to salvation was through secret knowledge, which had to be taught by their Gnostic specialists. John’s point here is that in true Christianity, there is no secret knowledge. God has plainly revealed to us everything we need to know for salvation, and it is so simple that we can pass it on to each other in the context of day-to-day life. Nobody needs to talk to some specialist or guru to get saved. God’s anointing abides in us. It is not just certain people, but every believer, who is set apart to serve God and empowered by the indwelling HS.

The other thing I should point out is the way God teaches us. Think about the overall content of the Bible. The Bible is filled with stories. Yes, there are portions, such as Paul’s letters, where the facts of our salvation are taught in a matter of fact way, point by point. But where did Paul get his information from? From the stories of the OT. From the stories about Jesus. From the stories Jesus told. The reason that the Bible is full of stories is because God reveals himself through

his actions in history. That history could be our history as individual people, or it could be our history as a congregation, or it could be our history as the people of God. Think about the prophets of the OT, for instance. They spilled a lot of ink making the connections between God's actions in Israelite history and God's character. God acted in this way and that way over and over again in our lives and in our history as a people, and therefore we can conclude that God has this trait and that trait. God delivered us from slavery, therefore he is loving. God stuck with us in the wilderness, therefore he is faithful. God gave us the law, therefore he is just. And so on.

Each of us can look at our own stories and make the same kind of connections. God forgave me, so he is gracious. God healed me, so he is powerful. God encouraged me, so he is kind. God waited for me to figure this out, so he is patient. God brought peace to my family or my church, so he is a peacemaker. We all have stories to tell, and those stories reveal the attributes of God to us and to the people we share those stories with. That's why our testimonies are so powerful. It's one thing to tell someone that God is merciful and so he will forgive them. It's another thing to tell someone that God forgave you for this or that when such and such was happening in your life and here's how it all unfolded and therefore God is merciful and can forgive them too. That's far more powerful. It is less often that God just comes out and directly says I am this or that. God more often reveals himself through our history, our life stories, whether individual or corporate. That's what we consistently see happening in the Bible. And that reality empowers each of us to share our stories and let God reveal himself through those stories. That's the kind of teaching to which we are all called. As priests, our stories reveal the significance and the power of the sacrifice of Jesus, our great high priest. As priests, we make a sacrifice of praise as we share our stories and their significance. To put this point in the context of thanksgiving, teaching others is an extension of our gratitude for how Jesus himself and our fellow believers have taught, guided, and encouraged us.

At the same time, that does not diminish the significance of teaching as a spiritual gift. Take a look at

*1Ti 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

*1Ti 5:18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."*

Because of their ministry, some elders received double honor from other believers in the church. There is debate about what that means. Does 'double honor' mean extra respect, or does it mean compensation? Some say double honor means double honor, not honor plus compensation. Others say the metaphors of verse 18 point to some kind of material provision being given.

In verse 17, the services of leadership, preaching, and teaching being provided by these elders are definitely spiritual gifts and skills that take considerable time and effort. Just to be clear, we are talking about teaching as a specific spiritual gift. One may reason that such effort warrants compensation. At the same time, one might point out that the application of many other spiritual gifts takes considerable time and effort. Teaching is an important gift and an important ministry of the church.

Because Paul was an itinerant apostolic worker and teacher, he had a legitimate right to receive full financial support from the Lord's people. But he intentionally waived that right whenever he worked with a new church. He didn't want to burden them. Paul supplemented his budget by working on the side- he made tents, which were in high demand when the emperor Claudius kicked the Jews out of Rome- you can read about that in Acts 18. I personally find it inspiring that the man we would consider to be one of the single most successful ministers in all of Christianity was bivocational.

So yeah the ministry of teaching is important. But so is service, so is hospitality, so is administration, so is encouragement, and every other spiritual gift. To put this point in the context of Thanksgiving as well, we can be grateful for our spiritual gifts. Paul taught that no part

of the body is to be devalued. Maybe you recall a passage we looked at a couple weeks ago:

*1Co 16:15 Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—*

*1Co 16:16 be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.*

Paul says to be subject to every fellow worker and laborer in Christ. To be clear, he says every fellow worker, not just teachers. We are all subject to each other because we actively serve each other. Think about it practically- nobody wants to accept advice or guidance about ministry from people who don't do any ministry. By the same token, and this is my personal opinion, any church volunteer who has significant skill and experience in their area of ministry is just as qualified to offer advice or guidance about how to do that ministry as any pastor who has experience in that same area of ministry. Why? Because you know what works in your situation, and every ministry situation, ministry context, is a little different. A pastor can come in and give poor advice if they don't understand the local situation.

This verse says we are to be subject to each other as fellow workers in the body of Christ. One of my convictions about ministry is that generally the people who are doing the ministry are the ones who should make decisions about that ministry. It is stressful when someone comes along and tries to tell you how to do your job when they are not doing it with you. I have no right to tell anyone in this church how to do their job. I hope we all have the humility to know that our suggestions may be unwarranted if we are not involved in that ministry. At the same time I certainly hope we all have the humility to entertain suggestions that are offered to us by others because regardless of which roles or areas of service we have in the church, we all share the same overall mission. As we dialogue about ministry, maybe we discover there are holes in our ministry as a church overall and we can talk about how to fill those holes, or maybe we discover

there are areas of overlap between the ministries within the church and we can simplify things. But the only way we will discover those things is if we dialogue about ministry. Biblically, every member, as a priest of God, can and should be involved in the conversation of how to go about the ministry of the church. I certainly have no intention of imposing any ministry strategy on this church. That's something we can create together.

We all teach one another, serve one another, and we all receive from one another. And we work together to fulfill the mission of God. That's what it means to be a priesthood of believers.

Let us pray...

Benediction:

Heb 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.