

Title: Able to Teach
Text: 1 Timothy 3.1-7
Theme: The qualifications of an elder
Series: 1 Timothy
Prop Stmt: The health of a church rises and falls on the character and competency of her leaders.

Read Text:

It starts from the moment of conception. The life of this little person, even in an embryonic stage demands attention. This little life, this tiny collection of cells, forming, developing and maturing are not only changing themselves, but this life is changing its environment. A mother's body goes through all sorts of change as she adapts to the life of another. All of this in preparation for birth and then the real fun begins. Whatever happened from conception to birth was merely the prelude to the main event. Every life demands attention. Change me, feed me, change me, clothe me, change me, hold me, change me, look at me, rock me, change me, lay me down, pick me up, talk to me, don't talk to me...it never ends. Pay attention to me! This drive to be noticed is more than a desire to have physical needs met. Every human being desires to be known, to be noticed, to be appreciated, to be affirmed, or to be heard. How many spouses feel all alone because they are not understood, or not heard?

The desire to be heard is a powerful desire and it is not all bad. You were made in the image of God. Your life has intrinsic worth because of that. That sense of worth is part of your God-given DNA. But, because we live under the curse of sin, that sense of worth is usually expressed in sinful ways. In other words, this God-given desire to be heard is usually expressed in sinful ways by which we try to demand attention. But getting attention can be as addicting as any form of heroin. And it can be dangerous, exceedingly dangerous. Most people who demand attention do not deserve it.

For example, what is happening right now? We are in a room where everyone is sitting and listening to one person talking. I have your attention and since, getting the attention of people can be a self-worshiping desire, this event can be dangerous. But, at the same time, teaching and preaching is the life of a church. In order for a man to be qualified to be an elder, there are requirements established here in I Timothy 3. All of the requirements to be an elder have to do with a man's character, except one and that requirement is that he be "able to teach."

But, hold the phone! Why am I talking to you about this? Why don't I simply offer a course on elder training or teacher training and not bother the rest of you with this? You need to hear this because every member of this church has skin in the game. Good elders will tend to grow healthy congregations AND healthy congregations will raise up good elders. Part of the beauty of this text is for us to understand, esteem, desire, pray for and work for good elders because good elders should not be taken for granted. Good elders are a gift to a congregation. This morning, let's consider what it means for both the elder and for the church members for the elder to be able to teach.

1. Teaching is essential to the life of a believer and the church.

Matthew 28.19-20

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe** all that I have commanded you.”*

Teaching, as a component of making disciples has a “follow in my steps” emphasis. In other words, good disciples know what to think and how to live.

Titus 2.1-6

In contrast to the “insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers” (Titus 1.10) who were teaching for their own glory, Paul tells Titus, *“But as for you, **teach what accords with sound doctrine**. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.”* Look at this carefully. What is Titus, as an elder in this church supposed to do? He is supposed to teach that which is in alignment with sound doctrine and part of what is in alignment with sound doctrine is for the older men of the church to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. Part of the responsibility of an elder is to teach so that the older men of the church do not grow old and cranky. There is nothing attractive, compelling nor adorning of the gospel when the older men grow cranky. For all the old men, here, let me ask you something. How much effort does it take to be old? None, right? It just happens. How much discipline and effort does it take to be cranky? None! There is nothing supernatural nor Christlike about being old and cranky. Being old and cranky is natural but the church is called to be a supernatural gathering of believers. One of the things that ought to mark our congregation is the utter joy and kindness of our older men. The older that you are, the closer to Jesus you are to be, therefore, the more you ought to reflect Christ. But, older men, it is easy to forget that, isn't it? It is easy to get cranky because other people have to do things for you now. It is easy to get cranky because the longer you live, the more sorrows you experience and it is easy to focus on the sorrows. Older men need faithful elders who will teach them not to be older men like the world who grow in crankiness, but to be older men who grow in grace. That is not going to happen, unless elders are teaching on that, and modeling that.

Luke 11.1

“...one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

What did Jesus do? He did not give them a 13-week course on a theology of prayer. He said to them, “When you pray, say, “Our Father, hallowed be your name....” He taught them, by showing them and by doing with them.

Ephesians 4.11-16

God gave the church teachers (amongst other gifts of leadership) in order to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine...”

Teaching is essential for every member to know his part and to do his part. Teaching is essential for maturity, unity, understanding, Christlikeness, and stability. Every church needs teachers who are these kind of people who can teach and raise up these kind of disciples.

Colossians 3.16

This text connects the singing of God’s people with the singing of the Word, so that as we sing, we are instructing and admonishing one another.

So, beloved, do you see how teaching is essential to the life of a believer and the church? This is not optional. Teaching is the lifeblood of our church. One of the complaints that people have at times about our church is that we are a “teaching church.” And when I hear that, I just shake my head in amazement. What other kind of church is there? It’s like saying, “I’m not going to that restaurant because they serve food there.”

Since teaching is so important, it makes sense that the leaders of the church be competent to teach and that a congregation knows what good teaching is, promotes, expects, values and guards good teaching. Because the church is teaching the Word of God, our teaching is going to be different than any other kind of teaching. One who teaches the Bible is not one who masters the Bible, but one who has been mastered by it. He is under the very Word that he is explaining. Being a teacher is not someone who has the gift of public speaking, but one who has a good understanding of the Scriptures, and a good understanding of himself and good understanding of others so that he can carefully, clearly, and coherently, communicate the Bible in a way that produces gospel fruit.

2. What should we cultivate and look for?

A. **We must provide opportunities for men to teach.**

The only way to know if a man is able to teach is to hear him teach and the only way to know if a man has the capacity to become able to teach is to give him several opportunities so that he can practice.

I love the fact that we have Adult classes on Sunday morning for a number of reasons, but one of those is because it affords so many of you the opportunity to hear the Bible from others beside me. It also gives us the opportunity to men who are able to teach, or who might be able to teach, or who think they are able to teach, but really aren’t, the opportunity to figure that out and/or grow in that area. Now, if we are going to provide opportunities for guys to learn how to teach and to find out whether or not they are able,

then we have to be a patient and encouraging congregation, right? Now, assuming that we are providing those opportunities, what should we look for?

B. Does the brother have the capacity to teach the Bible?

Bad teaching reads a message into the text and claims that the Bible is saying something that it does not say. Good teaching rightly interprets the text and so that what is taught is not placed into the text by the teacher but is taken from the text by the teacher. It takes training to learn how to interpret the Bible. It takes a measure of skill to be able to explain the Bible in a way that people can understand it. A teacher needs to be taught. A teacher has to have more than passion, he has to possess an intellectual ability to be able to understand grammar, syntax, and he must have the capacity to think and speak logically.

Now, some guys do this better in larger settings than others. Other brothers are particularly skilled at teaching the Word in a counseling situation, or in a smaller setting. The ability to teach is not demanding that every elder be an exceptionally gifted public orator, but one who has the capacity to teach the Bible. I think that one of the evidences of this gifting is seen with the man's wife and kids (if he is married and has a family.) That is part of the spiritual genius of this text. How do you know if a man is able to teach? Well, does he teach? And if he teaches, do the people who hear him, learn and look more like Jesus as a result?

So, let's say that this brother here is really comfortable in his home, teaching his children and he does. But, put him in front of others and he's so nervous that everyone gets nervous and the result is that the only thing that everyone learned was how nervous he was and the incredible capacity he had to sweat in public and that he shouldn't wear a dark shirt next time. That brother, may, over time develop into being a good teacher. But, in order for that to happen, people need to be patient and encouraging.

C. Does the brother teach like an elder?

An elder is one who thinks more about the congregation and their need of the gospel than he does about making a good impression. He is a shepherd who knows the joys, sorrows, tendencies and tender spots of the flock and is able to speak to those issues in his teaching. An elder who is able to teach is going to be someone that gives you the sense that he really cares about you. He really wants us to take another step in becoming like Jesus.

But, teaching like an elder, means that he is (as we'll study later) gentle and not quarrelsome. How does this brother respond when someone in class challenges him or disagrees with him? Does he take those disagreements personally? Does he react with irritation and frustration and demean others? Does he know how to respond to theological questions?

Paul said in 2 Timothy 2.24 that the "*Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with*

gentleness.” You can use the truth like a baseball bat, and win an argument and leave your opponent bruised, or you can speak the truth in love. Winning an argument will never capture one’s heart for Christ, but speaking the truth in love may.

D. Do others profit from his teaching?

Is there gospel fruit from this brother’s teaching? How does this brother influence those around him to think more like, smell more like, live more like and react more like Jesus? This really is the point, isn’t it?

Let’s say that you were responsible for our Adult Bible Fellowship groups that meet on Sunday mornings. Each class needs a teacher. Each class needs something to be taught. Each class needs a leader. Each class needs adults. Each class needs a format. So, you work on developing a system and a training program to the point where, every class has a teacher, has a series of lessons the teacher is teaching, has a back-up teacher, has a leader who oversees those who attend, has regular opportunities for fellowship and for staying connected with one another. Let’s say that one Sunday, it worked, I mean everything you organized and strategized and planned actually worked. On that Sunday, every class had a teacher who actually taught the lesson he was supposed to and that every class had a back-up who was ready on a moment’s notice to step in, should the main guy get benched for concussion protocol and that every class had a leader, who knew and agreed that he was the leader and that he took attendance, greeted everyone by name, facilitated the prayer time and planned a wonderful event for the class and on Monday, you received all of the reports that had every box checked that all of these things had happened as you envisioned. Wouldn’t that be glorious? Would, having every box in your organizational flow chart marked, and every line filled in not cause the angels in heaven to rejoice and do a happy dance? No, the point in having teachers and organization is not in having teachers and organization, but so that people will take another step in looking more like Jesus. The question to ask is, do people who are influenced by this brothers’ teaching tend to take steps toward looking more and more like Jesus?

E. Does this brother teach privately?

An elder does not just teach publicly, but this brother teaches privately as well. If he is too busy preparing for his public ministry that he has no time for private ministry, then he has lost sight of his ministry. When we are looking for men who are able to teach, we are looking for men who are teaching others over a cup of coffee, in study groups in their home, through correspondence or text messaging. We do not appoint a man as an elder and hope that the title will be something he lives up to, but the title is affirming something that he is already doing.

F. Does this brother hold to the same distinctives that the elders do?

The higher up the authority structure, the greater the theological alignment needs to be. In order to be a member of this church, there is a foundational doctrinal statement we all adhere to. It is foundational, but not comprehensive. Our doctrinal statement covers in

broad terms the essentials of the Christian faith and clarifies how we function as a church. But, there are some doctrinal distinctives and areas of theological emphasis that the elders hold because we see them as being important to guarding the gospel and the church.

G. Is this brother teachable?

Is this brother humble? Is this brother a team player? Is this brother open to correction or does he try to argue with you at every point? This issue is very, very important. The Bible teaches us to not trust in our selves, but to trust in God because the heart of the Bible is the gospel and all of the Bible points to Christ. Only Christ can save people. Only Christ can forgive sin and redeem a person from judgment. Therefore teachers not only have to know this, but they must teach in a way that reflects it. A person who refuses to be corrected is generally someone who trusts way too much in himself. Christ is the hero of the Bible and teaching must be ultimately about Christ. If someone trusts too much in himself, then he is going to make things more about himself instead of being about others. A teachable brother holds his life and ministry in an open hand before others.

Teaching has a level of exposure to it. The more public the venue, the more exposure there is. Anytime something is done publically, there is a higher ratio of risk to reward. Think of the field goal kicker who comes into the football game with .02 on the clock in the 4th quarter with his team down by 2 points. If he makes the kick, the reward is incredible. If he misses, the loss is inconsolable. The pressure of the public heightens the drama so much that the opposing team will generally call a time out in order to “freeze” the kicker. Make him feel the pressure of the expectations of others. But, no one will go to hell if he misses. In spite of the media hype, eternity is not at stake.

But teaching the Word means that you are teaching truths that rightfully understood and embraced will change a person for eternity. Not only that, but this Word is not your Word, it is God’s Word. A man who is able to teach is one who is awed and overwhelmed at this responsibility. He desires it, but he fears it all at the same time. He wants people to learn and wants them to grow, but he is fearful that he will too much enjoy their praise, so he doesn’t know how quite to respond to comments of praise.

The church has had too many teachers who did not know what they were talking about and have taught some really unhelpful things. The church has also had too many teachers who were full of themselves and even though they taught good stuff, they did it in a self-glorifying manner. But, when a church has a group of men who are collectively humbled by the Word, who love and serve their people, who are knowledgeable in the Scriptures and learned in theology, are able to use the Word to help people, and raise up other elders, that church is blessed.

Expect faithful teachers and teaching. Pray for faithful teachers and teaching. Learn to discern, value and appreciate faithful teaching. Develop an appetite for it. Encourage faithful teaching. Bring your Bible. Bring a hungry heart. Expect the gospel. Bring a humble mind. Engage with what is being taught. Jesus said that man does not live by

bread alone, but by every word that comes from God. Live as if your very life depends on you hearing and knowing God's Word because, it does.