

Opening Words

We are not just passing on information to satisfy intellectual curiosity. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that if we impart information everything will be OK with people. We must teach people to obey!

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Gifted leaders are crucial for the founding, development, and growth of the Church. In our previous broadcast, we began exploring Ephesians 4:11-12 which says that 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.”

We focused in our previous message on apostles and prophets. We saw that while in one sense the original apostles were unique and cannot be duplicated, there is another aspect of apostolic ministry that continues and blesses the church by expanding it to new regions and by uniting churches over large geographical areas. We also saw that while in one sense the original prophets were unique and cannot be duplicated, there is another aspect of prophetic ministry that continues and blesses the Church by helping it to be pure and holy before God and to focus on the mission of the Church.

Today, we look at evangelists and pastors and teachers. Evangelists were and are men and women who are exceptionally gifted and effective in sharing the Gospel. This sharing could be in public preaching, private witnessing, using radio, using music, or a host of creative measures that spreads the saving message of Jesus Christ to the world. I think we would all agree that Billy Graham has the gift of evangelism. What a privilege I had in growing up and hearing him preach. I have good friends who are following Christ today because of his ministry.

But we must not think that the gift of evangelism looks this way only. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ in the 1950s was not a preacher to the masses, but he was an organizer of the masses and he equipped God’s people to summarize their faith in a succinct message easily communicated and transferred. Because of his ministry, millions have heard the Gospel. Have you heard of the Jesus Movie? It was a movie on the life of Christ based on the Gospel of Luke that came out in the late 1970s. Bright’s organization took that movie, adapted it so that a clear presentation of the Gospel could go with it, and they have been translating it into the languages of the world. Over one billion people have seen this movie!

All this is evidence of the risen, glorified Christ who is blessing his church with gifted leaders. But notice in the case of Billy Graham and Bill Bright, their gifts look different from one another. Not all evangelists have the same kind of ministry. Remember what we discovered in 4:7, Christ measures out his grace in different ways and different portions to his people according to his will, but this different measure of grace is all from the same Lord, for the same Gospel, and for the same cause of building up His Church in the world.

What if a person does not have a powerful evangelistic preaching ministry like Billy Graham or a powerful organization ministry like Bill Bright? Should people conclude that this is the only expression of the gift of evangelism? Not at all. Every church has people with the gift of evangelism. Sometimes one of the pastors will have it but often different members of the church will have the gift of evangelism. In the church where I most recently pastored, one of the pastors was gifted in evangelism. It seems like he was leading people to Christ all the time! This was his passion and he let us know it! This is what he wanted the Church to be involved in all the time! We appreciated his zeal and example and we benefited greatly from it.

There are also members of the Church who are not on staff who are effective in sharing the Gospel. A good friend and his wife tell me that they led their mother to Christ many years ago who in turn became a fervent evangelist for the Lord. She would tell anyone at any time about her Savior. They said she could be in a checkout line at a store and she would witness to people and lead them to Christ on the spot! My mother told me that my sister, who is now with the Lord, was that way. She died when she was only 21. I was 7 at the time. It was heartbreaking for us. But my sister left a legacy of loving the Lord and fervent witnessing. She would witness to people all the time.

Keep in mind that all of us, even if we do not have the gift of evangelism are called to be a witness. When Jesus gave the Great Commission in Acts 1:8 he said, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Notice that he did not say, that he would give the gift of evangelism to a few. In this verse, he said he would give the Holy Spirit to empower all his people to be witnesses for him. Paul told Timothy, “Do the work of an evangelist.” We don’t know if he had the gift or not, but it didn’t matter, there was evangelistic work to do and Paul told him to do it. We need to have the same mindset. All of us must share the Gospel.

We better get to the last category of gifted leaders. Paul says that the risen, enthroned Christ has also given pastors and teachers. Some people think that this refers to two different kinds of people, one who is a pastor or shepherd of people and another kind of person who is a teacher of God’s truth. Others think it refers to the same person who is both a shepherd and a teacher. I think it can go either way.

The word pastor is a synonym for the word shepherd. A shepherd guides and guards his flock. He makes sure his sheep are protected and healthy. Part of that work is to ensure that the sheep are well fed. In the church, God gives leaders who care for the members of the church. And caring involves a lot more than imparting information through teaching. Caring for members of the flock may involve counseling, visiting, and listening. Caring for members of the flock means that we realize they are more than students who take notes from our sermons. It means that we realize that they have emotional and physical needs as well as the intellectual need to learn God’s word.

Of course, pastors can’t even come close to meeting the many, diverse, and complex needs of all the members of the church which is why wise pastors will set up a small group system where people learn to care for one another. If they don’t do that one of three things will result. Either the pastor will burn out, trying to meet all the needs himself. Second, the church will remain small as the pastor tries to do everything. Or third, the church may grow, but it will not be a place where

people's emotional and physical needs are met. It remains superficial. That is why pastors are to use their gift to equip the members to do the work of the church. We'll get to that idea in coming broadcasts, but I had to say that here and now for any pastors who are listening. You can't do all the shepherding work in the church and you must enlist others.

This gift is more than caring for people's emotional and physical needs. We must also teach the people. I want to share three things I have learned about teaching people. First, we must teach for life change. We are not just passing on information to satisfy intellectual curiosity. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that if we impart information everything will be OK with people. We must teach people to obey. Listen to these familiar words of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Did you catch the last part of that – teach them to observe, or obey, all that I commanded you. Our teaching of God's word must be with an eye toward people putting the Word into practice.

Here is a second emphasis on teaching God's people. Pastors must build a biblical worldview. This means that we teach God's people that the truth of God's word is the truth about everything. The Bible is not just a nice message about how to obey a few commands to make us feel better until we die and go to heaven. The Bible is the truth about everything in life. It is a comprehensive system that addresses political, economic, cultural, and educational issues. It provides a framework for understanding all of life. Every religion and philosophy in the world presents their worldview. This is their attempt to answer the big questions of life – where did we come from, what's wrong with the world, what is the solution to our problems. We must see that the biblical record provides a worldview, a way to view everything in the world.

Third, our teaching must teach the overarching narrative of Scripture which is the kingdom of God. The bible has over 2000 stories in it and we could easily get lost in all the stories and commands and principles. The Bible then becomes only a story book to inspire us, or it becomes only a legal reference book where we find our proof texts to tell us to do one thing and not another thing. But the Bible was never intended to be merely a story book to inspire us or a legal reference book with proof texts. The Bible was given to convey the one, controlling narrative of Scripture which is the restoration of God's kingly authority on earth. It tells us what God has done in this great story, what he is doing today, and the role you and I can play in advancing the reign of God throughout the earth.

Now that's teaching – teaching for life change, teaching to build a worldview, teaching to connect people to the Story of God's plan for the world. That kind of teaching is part of shepherding the flock. The risen, enthroned Christ has given gifted leaders to combine this kind of caregiving and instruction to help the members of the flock grow up and become mature.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers, all gifts from Christ for his glory in the Church which then grows up and becomes a bright light for the world. God is blessing many churches today in these ways. May he bless your church as well with these gifted leaders.