

The Shepherd's Instruction

Selected Scriptures

August 18, 2024

Rather than jumping back into Luke's Gospel and our study of Luke's Gospel, we're going to do, as I mentioned, a short series on shepherding, series on pastoral ministry. This is going to be more of a topical than an expositional series, just a three-week series. I trust it will be faithful to the exegesis of Scripture and the doctrine of Scripture. But over the next three weeks, what I would like to do is speak to you about the shepherd's instruction and the shepherd's exhortation and the shepherd's protection.

I don't intend to give you everything that a pastor does because there's so much to, to cover. But at least these three things I felt would be good little headings for our just short series on shepherding: The shepherd's instruction, the shepherd's exhortation, and the shepherd's protection.

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So it's how the shepherd or pastor, elder, overseer, if you will the word Bishop, synonymous terms, by the way, all described in the same office, the same role. So what is the call of God on a pastor to instruct, to exhort, to protect the flock of God? Because after all, that is his calling, his role, his duty before God, and his responsibility before all of you. So there's a sense in which I'm going to be, for the next three weeks, preaching my own job description.

I'm going to be putting myself out there so you can see what I'm accountable to. And I trust that you will, in love and gentleness, hold me accountable to that job description, that you'll pray for me and the other elders and pastors in the same regard, that we would live up to what God has called us to do.

I'd like to begin this morning by having you turn to the end of John's Gospel, end of John's Gospel, chapter 21. And we'll start in verse 15 of John 21. In John 21, we get to listen to a post, this is how I like to call it, a post resurrection leadership meeting. Post resurrection leadership meeting where Jesus meets

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with his eleven Apostles. Remember Judas Iscariot, he departed from the twelve making them eleven. That would be rectified in Acts Chapter 1 with the choosing of Matthias.

But right now it's eleven Apostles and this meeting happens in John 21 after a good breakfast on the beach, which is where I think all leadership meetings should be held; on the beach, over fresh caught fire-roasted fish. Elders, let's make that a habit, all right. But it's in this setting that Jesus addresses Peter directly to restore, to single him out from among the other Apostles and restore him back into ministry and get him back on track. And he does this in the presence of the other ten.

So Jesus is asking Peter three questions, three questions that expose Peter's heart. And as I said, he does so in the presence of the other ten Apostles. The three questions that he asked Peter elicit from Peter a believing response. And all three of those questions and those three responses overturn Peter's three denials, showing that the denials of Peter are not true; Peter's true self, so to speak. They're not his regenerate self. That's not really who Peter is.

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It's the truth that he proclaims in his love for Jesus Christ, that's the truth of a regenerate heart, regenerate life. Peter's answer is a test to the reality of a regenerate heart, to a sincere faith and love for Jesus Christ. That's the truth about every believer. And so now having reestablished that, overturning Peter's denials, Christ then recommissions him to the work. Look at John 21:15 to 17, "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"More than these," might have referred to the other disciples, might have referred to fishing, what he had turned back to; probably refers to the other disciples. You, do you really love me more than these other disciples, as you've affirmed. "And Peter said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' So he said to him, 'Tend my lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Shepherd my sheep.' He said to him, the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' And Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you

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know all things, you know that I love you.' And Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'"

As much as I would like to camp out in this text for the rest of the hour, contemplate the richness of this text, the need of this hour requires us to focus on the language of Christ's Commission in particular: Tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep. The word, tend, in this translation. Tend, Jesus uses it there in verse 15 and verse 17. It's the verb *Bosko*.

Bosko and that pictures a shepherd or a herdsman, who's watching over a flock and tending the sheep as they graze. The shepherd makes sure that the sheep are safe for the express purpose, so that they can eat, so they can eat in safety, so they can eat without fear of wolves or predators coming upon them.

The word that Jesus uses in verse 16, shepherd my sheep, is the verb, *poimaino*, which emphasizes the shepherd's work of leading the sheep, guiding the sheep, caring for them. It is a verb with all kinds of implications; especially, administrative implications is a lot of administration in the pastoral work, as

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pastors track the health, the growth, the maturity of the sheep. As the pastors track the, the gifts of the sheep or the gifts of the flock to the church and are good stewards of the gifts of the flock, so much involved in this, shepherd my sheep command.

Some of you may feel a bit nervous about pastors asking questions about your spiritual lives. Poking around a little bit, investigating your thinking, trying to figure out why you think the way you, things you do. The trying, trying to understand what it is you believe or don't believe. What you really trust in, what you don't, how you spend your time, your money, your priorities, what they are. What they are.

That might seem a little bit intimidating to some of you, but then when you stop and realize that this is what Christ has chosen and called pastors to do. This is not our decision to put ourselves in that role in your life, it's Christ's decision. And he makes that decision to give you the gift of pastors and shepherds for your good, for your health, for your spiritual benefit, and for your growth, which leads to your spiritual joy.

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If you can stop and remember that. And especially when the difficult questions come, when it feels a little uncomfortable, when the pastor's getting into your kitchen, so to speak, maybe you'll be better inclined to let us in a little bit further because it's what Christ has chosen. And you say, oh, but you're not Christ. You're an imperfect man, granted, but this imperfect man and the others like me are the ones that Christ has chosen to put into your life, and even through imperfections, by his providence to lead us and shepherd us into truth, into greater greener pastures.

Such a one is Peter, clearly an imperfect man. He gives all of us pastors a bit of relief, as we see his failures recorded on the pages of Scripture. But Peter is restored by the Lord, by the Lord who is omniscient, the Lord who sees all things. He restores him, drawing out the confession of his love for the Lord. "Lord, you know all things." You're omniscient. And that means, as you can see directly into my heart and my love, as feeble as it is, as frail as it can be, as imperfect and unstable as it is at times, "you know that I love you." You know that that's in the depth of my heart. You put it there.

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Having drawn out that confession, Jesus then recommissions Peter, puts him back on task to attend to his calling and to attend and to shepherd Christ's sheep, which I'm going to tell you is an all-consuming task, to shepherd the sheep. Near the end of his life, after Peter had been in ministry for more than 30 years, he exhorted his fellow elders. He said, "as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that's to be revealed; shepherd, the flock of God among you, exercising oversight."

The main verb in that exhortation, *poimaino*, shepherd, that is the same verb Jesus used in John 21:16 to recommission him. And Peter tells his fellow elders in 1 Peter 5 how to shepherd, how to exercise oversight, and how not to. He says you're to exercise oversight, you're to shepherd the flock of God, exercise oversight willingly, not under compulsion. You're not pressed into service.

You do this because you're running after it, because you rejoice to do it. Those are the kind of men who are called; you do it eagerly, not for dishonest gain. There's nothing else

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motivating you. Money, fame, notoriety, you don't, you don't care about any of that stuff. You're eager to shepherd the flock of God. You're also shepherding and exercising oversight, not as someone on your high horse or up in your ivory tower, but you're among the flock. You're examples to the flock, not lording it over them, but counting yourself as a sheep among sheep.

Shepherding souls goes way beyond what is required for shepherding literal sheep. Some people make that metaphor, try to stand up and walk on all fours, so to speak. I mean, shepherding, it's a great metaphor. It's a wonderful metaphor because it conveys the basic character of the work. It's an all-consuming day and night task. It's about hard, often thankless, mostly inglorious work.

But there's way more to know about shepherding than just observing a literal shepherd, in a literal field with literal flocks of sheep. It's not just about that, as the New Testament makes very clear, there's more to know, more to see, to understand what's required. As those Christ chose and called to shepherd his sheep, to see how the gifts and the abilities the

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Spirit has given to them are to be employed, we look to the rest of the New Testament.

We fill in the definitions, and the meaning, and the metaphor from the rest of the Word of God. We find in Christ, Christ himself, the supreme example of shepherding, and then we learn from the examples of the Apostles. We go back to the prophets and the priests of the Old Testament and see the continuity from old to new and how people are cared for, and taught, and instructed.

We can learn from faithful shepherds in the history of the Church and see how they interpreted the New Testament, and interpret the Scripture, and how they engaged the task in their own time, as they pursued faithfulness to the Lord. But ultimately, we have to go back to the direction and the instruction of Jesus Christ by his Spirit in his Word, in the ministry of the Apostles and the prophets, all recorded for us in the New Testament.

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Just as I read earlier, Paul told Timothy, 1 Timothy 3:15, "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Us pastors, shepherds, elders and really all of you following our example, that's what we are, the church, the household of God, the Church of the living God, that is the called-out ones, where the living God is making himself known and heard and obeyed. We are the pillar in support of the truth. We uphold it by proclaiming it, by teaching it.

So for today, we're gonna consider the shepherd's instruction. The shepherd's instruction. This is the pastor's chief duty, which is to feed the flock, which means really the preaching and the teaching of the Bible and its doctrine. I'm going to give you my thesis statement up front on the chief of all shepherding duties. Preaching, teaching, instruction, and that's to say this: Shepherd's instruct the flock of God by the public preaching of Scripture and by the public and private teaching of Scripture, doctrine, and theology.

I'll say that again, Shepherds instruct the flock of God by the public preaching of Scripture and by the public and private teaching of Scripture, doctrine, and theology. Now based on my thesis, the task of the pastor sounds, hopefully to you, it sounds exceedingly simple, doesn't it? Just preach the Bible and then teach the Bible and its doctrines and its theology.

It's, I'm not being facetious here when I say it's a simple task. It is a simple task. It's exceedingly simple because it's straightforward. We have a Bible. We have the truths of each individual passage of Scripture, and then we take subjects on Christ or the Spirit or the Word or God. We gather all the texts, rightly interpret it into doctrinal understanding of Scripture, what the Bible teaches about this doctrine or that doctrine, and then we want to synthesize all those doctrines so it's in a, it's in a coherent, cohesive, non-contradictory system of understanding called a theology: systematic theology.

It is simple, it's straightforward, it's hard. Pastors really have a simple, straightforward task. But though our task is simple, as I hope it's just plain common sense; something like

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that consumes the life of the pastor. It's an all-consuming life dominating from call to death task. This is what Paul said at the end of his life, having done this simple task for his whole entire life since his calling, since his salvation. He said, "I'm already being poured out." He pictured himself as a drink offering liquid.

Liquid has no power of its own. The wine poured out before God, it's subject to the pourer, it's subject to and whatever, it has no power of its own. Its power is in its substance. It's being poured out. He spent himself in this simple task, and he did it for his entire life. Why is this simple, straightforward task so hard? What makes it such a challenge for us as pastors, shepherds, elders? Let me give you a few outline points you can track along, is.

All that's my introduction, by the way. So you can't judge my time and time starts now, as I get into the first point. Number one, why is it so hard? What makes it a challenge? Because there is a constant need. Number one: there's a constant need for instruction. The constant need for instruction makes this an

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all-consuming lifelong day and night, it is not 40 hours in the work week, it's 80 hours. It's 120 hours.

It's three full time jobs, doing this work, the constant need for instruction. And it's particularly difficult, I think any pastor would tell you this throughout church history, it's particularly difficult in, out of season times, for the Word of God. We're aware of this, but I think it bears pointing out, we are a nation under God's judgement right now, aren't we?

And believe me, folks, this reality that we are a nation under divine judgement has massive implications for the pastoral ministry, because listen, a people that's under the judgement of God, they don't think well, they don't listen well, they don't learn well, because they're disinclined to submit to authority. They're filled with pride, not humility. They're opposed by God and under his curse and judgement. They reject accountability.

They're distracted by temptation, polluted by sin, compromised by love for the world. Paul speaks of those that God handed over like this in a society in Romans chapter 1, with this degrading,

declining levels of judgement of him handing them over first to sexual impurity because of idolatry, in Romans chapter 1.

Lacking any humility, repentance, God hands them over to further impurity, to be enslaved to inordinate desires, unnatural desires, not men for women, women for men, but now men for men and women for women, as we see.

And then lacking repentance, not waking up to the condition of their sinfulness, God hands them over further, Romans 1:28, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind." Other translations render that a depraved mind or a debased mind, to do those things which are not proper. We got one party in our political system that is seeking federal funding so that we can, so that we can mutate our children to conform their outer selves to what they think their inner selves are. That is a debased mind.

Paul's lists in Romans, one of those things which are not proper starts with what controls them. He's speaking about the inside; internally, he's talks about unrighteousness. You can turn there if you like and see it for yourself. But those things which are,

which are not proper starts with what controls them on the inside. Their thinking is controlled by unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, which is another way of saying covetousness. They covet. They desire what other people have, what's not been given to them.

They're controlled by evil, they're envious, murderous, striving, they're deceitful, they're malicious. All that's going on the inside and it from those controlling sins of the heart, Paul then moves to external behaviors. He talks about gossip, slander, arrogance, violence, boasting, and disobedience to parents. When you see those behaviors and you wonder what is driving that, back up in the list, and look at the first list. A heart of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice produces that bad fruit.

The sins controlling them on the inside create external behaviors that not only come to characterize them but also degrade them further and dull their minds, making them more like wounded, diseased, rabid animals than rational men and women. They are Romans 1:31, "without understanding, untrustworthy,

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unloving, unmerciful." And further, in verse 32, "they give hearty approval to those who are just like them." They want you to join them not only in tolerating their sin, not in affirming them in their sin, but joining them in celebrating their sin. In other words, they have warped sympathies.

They take up the cause and the complaint of sinners, not the cause of the righteous. They sympathize with men in their sins and all their complaints, and they rebel against the cause of the righteous. They rebel ultimately against God. Now, can you reason with people like that, those who have debased minds? Can you dialogue with them?

Can you engage in dialogue? Those who are characteristically untrustworthy, are they good dialogue partners? Are they sincere? Honest and open with you, playing by the same rules as you're using in a conversation. More to the point, when you take them to the authority of God's Word, which is what as a Christian we must do. We're not the authority. Society and its rules are not the authority. It's not a collective consciousness that determines our laws and rules and everything else.

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God and his absolute standard of law is the authority. And so when we inevitably take them to the authority of God's Word, for those who have rejected the most basic and primary authority of their lives, which is parental authority, for those who are characterized by disobedience to their own parents, they have a heart disposition to rebel against authority.

So what do you do with people like that? What does the Bible tell us to do with people like that? We're not to reason with them, dialogue with them, we're not even to debate with them. You know what we're to do? Preach to them. We're to proclaim the truth of God's Word. We are heralds of the gospel, preachers of the law. We're prophetic. We're declaring, thus saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord in the law, and it's the consequences for you violating it and here is the offer of the Lord of his grace, if you'll bow the knee, humble yourselves, repent, and believe.

We preach law and gospel. We preach the word. It's what John the Baptist came doing, isn't it? He came preaching the Kingdom of God. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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Jesus Christ after him, first words recorded about him, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and all those and only those whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated by his invisible work that give external evidence of that new birth by believing, and obeying, and by following.

So for those who are regenerate, saved by divine grace unto faith and repentance. Let's ask another question. Has there been any effect of this Romans 1 decline in our nation? Has there been any effect of that decline on them? Even regenerate people have. Let's ask it more personally. Have we been affected by the culture that we've been saved out of? Have you been affected? Has your mind been affected? Has your thinking been affected? Have your sympathies been affected by the world that you live in? Any lasting results of that?

If the answer to those questions is not yes and maybe not, Amen, but oh me, oh my. If the answer to those questions is not yes, of course we've been affected, then we have to ask, well then what need is there for repentance? What need is there for my

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sanctification? What is the issue with me anyway? Why am I not absolute perfection in my thoughts, my words, behavior, actions?

We have to go right back to, oh yes, we've been nurtured, and raised, and weaned, and cultivated, and groomed in this world around us, and we enter into the church. It doesn't always just drop at the door. Paul reminded Titus of this when he commissioned him to go and appoint elders in Crete. He said those who enter the front door of your church in Crete, Titus, "one of themselves a prophet of their own, said this about his countrymen, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.'" And Paul says this testimony is true. You ever met a Cretan, right? So for this reason, "reprove them severely so they may be sound in the faith."

One tragic consequence of the judgement of God on our nation. Those who are granted by divine grace, faith to believe in Christ, and repent of their sins. Those who are saved from this wicked and depraved generation, they have so much to overcome in simply learning the truth, just to absorb what's here. Isaiah

lamented to his people, calling them out of sin, to repent and to return to Yahweh

In Isaiah chapter 1, verses 4 to 6, he cried out with a prophetic lament. "Alas, sinful nation, people heavy with iniquity, seed of evildoers, sons who act corruptly." Just make a comment there. If he's preaching to the seed of evildoers and the sons, well, then there's generations before those people who produce them. There's generation after generation of sinful thinking, and sinful patterns, and sinful habits. Isaiah continues, he says, "They've forsaken Yahweh, they've spurned or despised the Holy One of Israel. They've become estranged from him. And the whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint from the sole of the foot, even to the head. There's nothing sound in it, only bruises and welts and raw wounds. Not pressed outer bandage, not soften with oil."

Listen folks, sin leaves a mark. The practice of sin cuts deep grooves in the mind, establishes deep, lasting patterns of thinking and feeling. Feelings jump out to the fore of the sinful mind so that feelings create habits and patterns of

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acting and reacting. It's very subtle and deep seated. Sick heads, faint hearts, unsound souls, they don't learn well. Learning requires discipline of the mind, and humility before the truth, and submission to the authority of the truth. Yes, it is true, regeneration changes everything.

Salvation changes everything. It results in faith that receives the saving grace of God. Justification is a radical, fundamental change of standing before God. It's a legal standing that changes everything. But the process of sanctification that starts at the moment of justification, at the moment of regeneration, that's just begun. New birth by the Spirit, which produces new life in Christ. It's called new for a reason. It is indeed new, as in like an infant new. The infancy of a new believer exists within a very old body, some of us older than others, one that has a past, a body that has a history.

Many Christians who enter the doors of the church, they enter in, and I can hear the rattle of bones from all the skeletons that they think are hidden in the closet but are actually dragged in carts behind them. There's a sin nature for

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Christians to overcome in all of us, and in some there are deeply ingrained patterns of thinking, habits of acting and reacting that are decades in the making, difficult to undo.

This is why, beloved, we love to preach the gospel to the children here. We want to see the children in our families come to know Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord from a very early age. We want them to be instructed in the, in the faith, in the goodness of God, to see his wisdom and trust him even in things they don't understand. We want them to know Christ. Children here, listen, we love you. We want you not to be saved later in life like some of us were.

We don't want you to have a remarkable testimony filled with how deeply you were lost in sin so that you could be saved from it. We want you to have a, a, continuity between early trust in your parents regarding them, loving them. A continuity that goes right into trusting God as your father, Christ as your Savior and Lord. Because sin has a, it affects and distorts your thinking. It hurts your mind. We want you to be spared from so much. So the preaching, teaching, years of repenting and obeying

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the truth, that is how an infant believer grows up into maturity in Christ. It takes time and instruction is essential.

Let me make one more brief point before moving on to another point. Comes from Amos 8:11 and 12, "Behold, the days are coming, declares Lord Yahweh, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of Yahweh. And people will wander from sea to sea, and from the north and even to the east, and they will go to and fro to seek the word of Yahweh. They will not find it."

Judah in the days of Amos was under divine judgment, and that divine judgment was a withholding of the words of Yahweh. Judah had refused to heed the words of the prophet, as the previous chapter demonstrates. And so because they won't listen to Amos, because they won't listen to the prophets that he sent by his grace, God's going to silent the prophetic witness in Judah, just shut their mouths, which is a terrible judgment, removing prophetic witness, silencing of people who will tell you the truth.

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Similar thing has happened in our own country. And like in Amos, it's not a famine for bread or a thirst for water. There would be a kind of grace in that judgement because taking away our food and our water is going to drive us to our knees because of the sake, for the sake of our body, to humble ourselves before the God who gives food and gives water.

Oh no, we're a sleepwalking people. We're comfortable, got plenty of bread, lots of stuff to dip it in, plenty of meat to go with it, plenty of not just water but all kinds of flavored drinks, and we're content and satisfied, and comfortable and at ease. And it's called somnambulism, Sleepwalking.

The famine we're involved in now is for hearing the words of Yahweh. So many of these little infants who have been born, regenerated by God's grace, born again in the context, many of them in weak churches taught by unqualified pastors, preached to by ignorant preachers. These little infants, they grow a little in the Word. They learn enough to become dissatisfied with weak preaching, break free from some Bad Religion, maybe have a bad

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experience or two that makes them kind of discontent, and disgruntled, and uproots them, and unseats them from relationships, and drives them, purges them from that church.

So they're spit out and wandering. They start wandering, seeking the Word of God, but they don't find it. Just like these people in Amos 8. And along the way, as they wander to and fro looking for the Word of God but not finding it, they pick up bad ministry patterns. They absorb false models. They operate by bad paradigms. They learn unbiblical expectations. But they don't know it.

They've all kinds of wrong models of what preaching should be, of what church should be like. They come in and their judgement is on the forefront of their mind, criticizing everything they don't like in the church. Some of them think they know a whole lot more than they do just because they spotted error in one church or context. A spiritual pride sets in and creates yet another obstacle for them, learning and growing.

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And when, by God's grace, they finally arrive in a sound church with sound teaching from biblically qualified shepherds, they're like the victims of starvation who cannot digest food. They're bloated, but they're empty, malnourished. They recoil the taste of food. They assume they know best how to feed themselves and how to nurture themselves; they don't. Takes time to heal, and to learn, and to get healthy enough to grow and to grow up strong.

Nevertheless, it's a diet of the pure milk of the Word and the meat of the Word that they so desperately need. They need truth, and they need a lot of truth. They need the whole truth and they need it constantly, all the time. They need to sit still with a submissive heart under the Word, preach to become accustomed to proclamation, accustomed to the hard work of learning well, to realize that they've got to exercise a mental muscle that they have let lie dormant for years. They got to, turn, tune their ears and their hearts to the pattern of sound words and sound doctrine.

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And they have to learn that the church service is about studying. Truth is the essential thing, so the Christians can learn to know who God is and what he's like. So the Christians can learn to obey God, to revere him, to magnify him, to rejoice in him, to love him with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. And then they can walk in obedience to him because they love him so dearly. They want to be counted, and known, and recognized as God's children. Nothing gives them greater pleasure.

So that's the constant need for instruction, which brings us to point two, point two and these points get shorter as we go. Point two: The chosen agents of instruction. The chosen agents of instruction. God answers the constant need for instruction to his people by supplying the church of Jesus Christ with chosen agents to give them biblical instruction. We could go several places, but I would just call your attention to a verse or a chapter that we have looked at a lot in our church and it's Ephesians chapter 4.

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Ephesians chapter 4, starting in verse 11, "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." And on it goes. The time of the Apostles and prophets came to an end at the end of the first century, at the end of what we call the Apostolic age, the product of their ministry. The Canon of the New Testament was complete at that time, when John put his pen down at the end of Revelation 22.

The ministry of the evangelists, pastors, and teachers is to take that Apostolic prophetic truth in the New Testament and the entire Word of God, all that's inspired by God the Spirit, infallibly written in the New Testament by men, superintended by the Spirit in the original autographs, those choice agents, the evangelist, pastors, and teachers, they proclaim the truth by preaching and teaching.

These agents of instruction, chosen agents of God, evangelist, pastors, and teachers, chosen servants of Christ, are set apart, called to this special work, equipped by the Spirit with gifts

suites to the work qualified by God's grace. According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, recognized as called, as gifted, qualified by the church, recognized by the church, so that they then are ordained and deployed by the elders of the church.

Says in this Titus chapter 1, these qualifications are as follows; for this reason, Paul tells Titus, "I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Note, in every city, plurality of elders. "Namely, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, who are not accused of dissipation, or rebellion. For the overseer must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious." That is, he likes to come to blows, he likes to fight.

"Not fond of dishonest gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those who contradict."

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That last verse, in particular, kind of gives insight into why God has chosen men as agents of instruction and not women. It's because of this, not only the teaching instruction role, kind of the demand for abstract thought, a preference for abstract thought, but also this exhortative role that makes relationships second to purity, and holiness, and principle.

It's 1 Timothy 2:12 to 14, God lays out the reason for choice of men for this office, for this role. He goes back to the created order and says it's because of the order of creation and it's because of the wisdom of design where God distinguished them male from female. There's no time right now to develop the thought, but it's just vital that public instruction of Scripture and doctrine and all the exhortation from the public, from the pulpit, from the teaching venues come from men, not women.

No matter what cultural winds are blowing, no matter who that offends, we must not offend the God who gave us the Word, that's primary. We sympathize with him and his interests, not the

culture. And believe me, those cultural winds enter into the lungs of men and women in the church. They enter into our church still blowing out these cultural winds. They may even agree in principle, say, yeah, men preachers, get it. But sometimes they can resist the practice, and sometimes verbally, sometimes quite demonstrably.

At one point during a time of potential discouragement for Timothy, Paul reminded Timothy that he is a chosen agent of divine instruction for the church. 1 Timothy 4:14 Paul tells Timothy, "don't neglect the gift within you which was given to you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the council of elders." And what was the ordained for Verse 13 previous verse, "until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture." The reading in that time came with explanation as well. So we're talking about an expository ministry.

Give attention to public reading of Scripture or an expository ministry, to exhortation and to teaching. Why? So people can learn the truth and obey it, so they can be sound worshippers of

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God. Paul tells Timothy in verse 15 that though he's been given a gift, he has a stewardship of that gift. He's responsible to develop it. He tells Timothy, "take pains with these things, be absorbed in them so your progress will be evident to all."

The gift of preaching and teaching has to be developed, like any natural gift or talent that you have, it has to be developed, otherwise it, it sits dormant. It has to be trained, and educated, and advanced by study, and reading, and meditation, and then by constant practice. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent, Timothy, to present yourselves approved to God as a workman who need not be ashamed." Why? Because "you're accurately handling the word of truth."

Interesting in that verse, Paul uses a verb that kind of reminds us of his role, his secular role as a tent maker. He uses a term that calls about cutting it straight. Cut the word of God straight. Be accurate. Pastors are to be lifelong learners, students. They're students of language, ancient language, dead languages. At the very least, they should be competent in Hebrew and Greek. And then even as they advance further, they advance

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into Latin, which sadly has gone by the wayside. Used to be taught in schools all the time.

I've gone back to school, as you guys know, and there's just a, a lament at the postgraduate level at how Latin's been tossed by the wayside. So now in my 50s, I got to learn in Latin. Do you believe this? Learning reformation languages, languages on the continent of Europe. All so we can read in the original primary sources, read in those texts so we can be good students. Knowing languages and understanding those things brings us into lexicography and grammar and syntax. Basic tools, but vital for exegesis, for doing history appropriately according to a good methodology for doing theology.

We're students of history. We reach back into history. We learn about warfare, politics, international relations, commerce, economics, empire, nations, socio cultural settings, factors that lead to changes among peoples and among societies. We learn about botany. We learn about food. We learn about customs, habits. We're students of people, whether it's people grouped

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into tribes, tongues, and nations, or people in families, people as individuals.

We're students of our own hearts first, knowing what leads to sin or to righteousness. Understanding the word by the word, the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Knowing both mortification and vivification. What leads to what we need to kill in our lives and what needs to come alive and fuel our studies for ourselves and for others.

As students of God in Christ, we're always pressing further into deep communion with the Triune God, which is a confrontation all the time, his purity and holiness with our sinfulness. And we're on our knees all the time confessing sins, seeing our weakness, seeing our need, crying out to him for help, to worship him, just to worship him rightly, in spirit and in truth; worshipping him in the excellence of each of his divine persons.

Michael Allen says, quote, "Theology is hard intellectual work." Man that's true. He goes on and says, "It demands not only intellectual but also moral and theological virtues for

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good execution." He goes on to say, "Theology involves self-denial, counter man's idolatry and thus needs wholehearted spiritual commitment." End quote. Man, that is true. And I beg God for the help and the grace and strength just to exercise my mind every time I turn my attention to the Word of God and to reading.

Just reading, and study, and theology, and doctrine, which is why the pastor is always at war with his own heart to mortify the flesh, to put aside distractions and to be gentle with others in doing so. Not to be this holier than thou pious monk walking around as if he's above everybody else, but no, acknowledging he struggles with everything that they do, as he fans into a white hot flame the gifts that God gave him, so he can burn brightly and loving God with all of his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. May God help us.

Charles Bridges says, "The minister's life must be a life of holy meditation and study. No man who neglects the Apostles exhortation to give attention to reading will long continue a profitable preaching to an intelligent congregation. The native

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resources, even of the most powerful minds, need to be replenished. Therefore, the preacher must not merely have been a man of reading. He must read still, or his sermons will be trite and barren of thought." End Quote.

Trite and barren of thought, that is exactly what describes many of the so-called pulpits in this country and men who are of the other sort, who are constantly repenting and pursuing knowledge of the Holy to understand God, to understand themselves before God, to understand people, to understand the work. Men like that, in a constant lifelong pursuit of learning, are Christ chosen servants for your instruction beloved, for the glory of God, in service to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastors and shepherds strive to be biblical, doctrinal, theological scholars, to know and love God, to love God's people; preaching and teaching the truth. So we see the need for instruction, how God meets the need through these chosen agents who are themselves students, always learning. Here's a Third Point: The common source of instruction. Common source of

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instruction. And I've already been hinting at this, so I'll keep this brief. The common source of our instruction is the Word of God, Holy Scripture, the Holy Bible. And I call Scripture common, a common source, not to denigrate, spritz, Scripture or to make it less than holy, but rather because the Holy Bible is the authority that is common to us all.

When I preach from the Word, you can open up your copy of God's Word and check my work. That's what you're to be doing. You'd be looking at your Bible and say, does that line up? Not, not, in a critical way, but just to say, does that line up? How am I understanding? Am I following his train of thought? This is why Jesus explained himself commonly in his ministry, explained himself, explained his teaching, often by going back and citing, and explaining Scripture.

He was not some maverick, just, here's a new way, reject the Scripture of the Old Testament because it's insufficient and follow me now. No! He said, everything I'm doing is in continuity with everything God's always said; it's your teachers. You've heard them say, but I say to you, you've heard

them teach, but I say to you, here's the truth of those texts. He was demonstrating continuity between his ministry and the Old Testament, showing the imprimatur or the approval of God and God's authority on his ministry.

One illustration suffices, remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures. You ever thought about why he did that? I mean, by the authority of his person, he being in the body of his resurrection, couldn't he have just proclaimed to them, look at me, I was dead, I'm alive, listen to everything I'm saying. He could have done that. It would have been totally righteous, totally appropriate.

He takes him to the Scriptures, in like manner, preaching of the Apostles in the early church in the book of Acts, expositing texts from what we now call the Old Testament. Paul did the same thing during his ministry, as we see clearly in Acts 20:27. He says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."

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I'm among those who thinks that the book of Hebrews is Paul's preaching sermonic material, probably penned by the writer Luke. That's my view. You could take me to task if you want to, another time. But I do think it's Paul's work and, it's, Hebrews is so rich in the Old Testament, isn't it? It's beautiful, beautiful Greek language, which shows Luke's hand, I think, the excellence of his Greek writing.

But it is Paul's thought, even if he didn't write the book of Hebrews or isn't the mind or the, the, sermonic material behind the book of Hebrews. Look at how he teaches. He is a scriptural thinker, and so he says, "I didn't shrink from declaring to the whole purpose of God? Other translations render that, *ta boulē*, the whole council of God, the whole council of God, the whole purpose of God, which is revealed and unveiled in the Scripture.

New, two Testaments of Scripture, what Paul calls the sacred writings. This power in this word has a power to affect regeneration. 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul told Timothy, "From childhood you've known the sacred writings which are able to give the

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wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ." God's word is the only source of instruction with the power to save sinners from eternal hell and to sanctify them with transforming power, to change that life from what it was to what God intends it to be, like Christ.

Paul says, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, "All Scripture," Old and New Testaments, "inspired by God, profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate." That word, adequate, doesn't mean, just so, so; *artios*, means capable, fully ready, totally fit, perfectly fit, equipped for every good work.

So use it, he says, 2 Timothy 4, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearance in his kingdom." And he loads it up, doesn't he? Here's my solemn charge: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, wanting to have their ears tickled. They'll accumulate for themselves teachers in

accordance with their own desires, and they will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry." Amen.

More to say. We'll go to a fourth point, number four: The comprehensive scope of instruction. The comprehensive scope of instruction. Back to Acts 20, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders as he commends them to God in his grace. He says in verse 20, "I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house." Public instruction, house to house instruction, equals comprehensive instruction.

Paul's example sets a pattern for pastors and teachers in the local church to provide comprehensive instruction in a common source, the whole council of God with a, com, comprehensive scope, or you might say several scopes. First, as I said, the comprehensive scope of venue, but also format. There's public and private instruction. There's the regular ministry, the Word from the pulpit, public and formal instruction of scripture

delivered through preaching and teaching to the gathered church. That's one venue, one format.

But there's also the occasional ministry of the Word, provided as a need arises, whether in formal instruction of discipleship or counselling, or the more informal instruction of the same. This instruction comes in a more private setting, informally, from house to house, in homes along the way, and coffee shops, and Panera Bread, and offices, driving from place to place in a car. Public instruction, formal instruction, and private informal instruction. Comprehensive. That's about the scope of venue, the format of teaching.

Second, there's a comprehensive scope in the kind of content as well. Pastors and teachers that have preached the Scripture, but they also need to teach the doctrines of Scripture, the theology of Scripture. That's, there's preaching passages of Scripture. There's also the teaching of its doctrines. Paul distinguishes doctrinal kind of instruction from preaching kind of instruction; technically preaching called the kerygmatic proclamation.

He distinguishes doctrinal instruction from preaching in several places in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul calls Timothy to instruct, exhort the Christians in Ephesus and by so doing, he'd be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith, the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you've been following.

So doctrinal instruction, a body of truth that is recognized as authoritative; summaries of doctrinal truth, like we just recited this morning in the Apostles Creed. Paul returns to the authoritative nature of this doctrinal theological instruction several verses later. If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, doctrinal content, theological explanation, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing.

That's why it's essential for an elder, part of his qualification prior to being ordained, that he's mature enough, sufficiently equipped and trained not only to handle texts of

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Scripture and preaching and teaching, but the doctrine theology of Scripture, so that Titus 1:9, "He can hold fast the faithful word and be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it." If you're going to refute, if you're going to correct, you got to know the truth. You got to know the doctrine of the truth.

Timothy also must, 2 Timothy 1:13, "Retain the standard of sound words which you heard from me." That word, standard, means an outline that delineates the boundaries of truth. It's a prototype against which all words and doctrine teaching are measured. So comprehensive scope of instruction applies to venue and format; the kind of instruction doctrine, preaching, theology.

Finally, the goal of instructions' comprehensive too, from start to finish of the life. Paul tells Timothy, 1 Timothy 1:5, a verse you know. "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith." That points to a long-term goal of living by Christian wisdom, making advances in practical living and Christian maturity. The goal is love from a

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pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith equals mature
Christian, grown up Christian.

So the shepherd's instruction, public and private, biblical,
doctrinal, theological instruction is both elementary, imparting
knowledge of the truth and advanced growth into wisdom by
practicing of the truth. Why is it that there's all this
emphasis on the truth? Why is it that God has specially chosen
servants given to his body and they're few in number, as James
3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren."
Just a few chosen for his churches.

Why is it that he dedicates certain lives to this particular
task? That'll be a lifelong task, that they will burn themselves
out in the doing of it; in order to pour into other people in
the church, to give them this truth. Because the Word of God has
power, doesn't it? My word, your word, the books we read,
fiction books, movies, podcast, no power; ultimately no change.

What is it that has power to save the Sinner from eternal
damnation? What has power to transfer the Sinner from the

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kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son? What has power to transfer a person from darkness to light, from error to truth, from unrighteousness, wickedness, and sin into righteousness, and purity, and holiness? There's only one word that has that power, only one word.

God says of his Word, he says, "Is not my word like a fire? Is it not like a hammer which shatters the rock in judgement? The Word scorches, burns away all that's false in the proud center." Which is why when sometimes people who profess Christ start feeling the heat, they pull away. The Word of God is like a hammer that crushes and pulverizes, the liar in his lies, the hypocrite in his hypocrisy, the rebel in his rebellion.

But for the humble believer, for the obedient penitent, the Word of God is implanted by the Spirit of God in the heart. It's able to save the soul, James 1:21. "The word is the power of God to those who are being saved," 1 Corinthians 1:18. It's no dead letter, but Hebrews 4:12, It's a living word, alive, productive. It's also active, effective, transformative.

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God's Word has power, called the heavens and the earth into existence. It created all that we see and know. And that's why Jesus Christ himself is called the living and incarnate Word, because he has power. God's Word has the power, the only power to save Sinners, to sanctify them till they conform to the image of his beloved son. And that is why the shepherds instruct the flock.

That is why the pastors and the teachers equipped the saints for the work of ministry, to do their work, that they are assigned by God, which is the ministry in and through the local church. Pastors and shepherds are preeminent slaves of Christ, setting an example for the rest of the slaves of Christ in the flock of God.

Beloved, you're not your own. None of you who names the name of Christ is your own. You're bought with a price. You're bought with precious blood. Therefore, glorify God in your life, and with your body, and with your words, and with your eyes, with your hands, and your feet, with your mind, and learn.

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In a few minutes, we're gonna come to the communion table and partake of the Lord's Supper together. In a view of that, I want to give you a list of questions that you can ask yourself so that you can do some self-examination before you partake of this fellowship ordinance laid before you. Hopefully these questions will help you to identify and then confess any sin that God brings to your mind. Repent of any ways that you have despised the truth subtly maybe, just by neglect, by indifference or maybe outward rebellion; any way that you have despised the shepherd's ministry of instruction.

This is going to help you reflect on that, confess it, repent of it, but also to think about what God has given you in dedicated people who are dedicated to your good, and your instruction, and your growth, and your maturity, dedicated to your joy. So use this time, also these questions, also to think about the gift of shepherds, and pastors, and elders, and teachers, and evangelists to help you grow in sanctification. Let it be an occasion for you, for joy and gratitude.

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Here's some questions for you. Number one: Do you fear the Lord? Basic question. Do you revere his Word? And do you respect and honor the servants of the word? Number two: Have you treated God's Word as holy, regarding it as the highest priority in your life? Does your attendance at church, and your attention in church, and your preparation for church, give evidence that you regard Scripture as holy?

Number three: Have you regarded your shepherds as gifts of God's grace to instruct you in the Word of God? Do you regard God's choice of them, in particular, not just shepherds in general, but these particular shepherds, and esteem them very highly in love, for, 1 Thessalonians 5:13 because of their work? Number four: Do you consider yourself in need of instruction? Are you a humble, dependent Christian, appreciating God's gifts of grace that come through your local church? Or are you proud, independent, arrogant, wise in your own eyes?

Number five: Do you recognize the power of sin in your heart, the power of sin that disorders your inner life? Do you practice regular, honest self-examination to discern how often your

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feelings are out in front and in control, hijacking your heart? Stealing away the prominence of your intellect that directs your will. Do you make a habitual practice to self-examine, check your emotions so that a well instructed mind is the priority? So that your will disciplines and directs your inner life, so that your emotions follow your mind and your will, instead of being out in front?

Number six, Do you see the church as a training center and the primary purpose of Sunday services, to worship God from the heart by learning and studying? Do you see sermons as targeting the intellect so the mind can inform the will and the affections and the emotions? And finally, number seven: Do you come to listen for the purpose of obeying the Lord of the Word? Do you seek knowledge for wisdom, that is, to imitate Christ by practicing the truth? Or do you seek knowledge for intellectual stimulation? Just some intellectual ear tickling entertainment.

Beloved, as you ask and answer questions like those for yourself, some of those things may sting your conscience and that's why God has given Christ to come to him. As we think

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about him in the symbol of the bread and the wine come before his table, think about his sacrifice for our sins. But some of these questions you're going to answer in the affirmative that I do think rightly about the church, about the word. Let that hearten in you, beloved, because that didn't come from you. That's a gift of God to you. Blessed are you because your eyes see, your ears hear, your heart understands.

Maybe you're like Peter. You failed at times, yes, but you cry out to the omniscience of God, and you say, Lord, you know all things. You know I love you, you know I love you. Take refuge and comfort in him. Give your heart fully to him and your mind. May all this help you reflect on your duty to submit to the Word and its instruction; leading you during our time of communion to confess, repent of any sinful thoughts, habits of thinking, and then to give thanks for God and his kindness to instruct our minds in the Word, because that is what results in a heart that loves God, with all the heart, soul, strength and mind, and loves neighbor as self.

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Our Father, we give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ and because of the inner working of the Holy Spirit. First to regenerate us and give us new life. Ears to hear your word, eyes to see the truth and see Christ as majestic and holy. A heart to understand the Word because of the spirits work to cause us to be born again to the living hope, to new life, to faith, and repentance in Christ. Give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Father, because you've given us life and truth, you've given us understanding. You have opened up your mind to us, the depths of your mind, and your understanding. All that you've prepared, that eye has not seen, nor ear has not heard, nor is the heart of man understood, but all that you've prepared for those who love you, you've revealed to us in Christ. We merely need to learn to be instructed.

Pray, Father, that as we think about the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ symbolized in the bread and the cup, that we give attention to our souls and orient our lives for the rest of our lives to be good learners of truth, to receive

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instruction, to be humble learners so that we could be obedient followers of Jesus Christ. And share not only in the sufferings that may come, but the glory that's to follow. We thank you for this eternal life. This changes us from the inside out. Pray that you would help us in our time of reflection, confession, and gratitude, and praise in this time of the Lord's Table in Jesus name. Amen.