

Session 4: Able to Teach

Quest: Blueprint

There are many reasons you are the man you are today. Many of you are successful, you take your faith seriously, you are educated, you are passionate, you work hard. Some of the reasons you are the man you are today is that God has given you innate gifts; a knack for easily picking up skills, a brain that is wired to solve problems, a native instinct to create art or play music. Your giftedness can also be attributed to overcoming adversity in your life; growing up poor, experiencing tragedy and suffering through loss. But one thing we all have in common, one universal experience that cuts across all cultures, ages, and races, is that all of us have been taught. You were taught to be the man you are today. You did not emerge from your mother's womb knowing the ins and outs of the oil and gas industry. You were not born with a passion for following Jesus. As a toddler, you did not possess near the knowledge you have today. Somewhere along the line, just about everything you know in life was imparted to you by a teacher.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul says that an elder, an overseer, a leader, must be able to teach, he must be a teacher. Paul expands upon this idea in the second list of characteristics for a leader in Titus 1:9: [A leader] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

In other words, a man who is worthy of respect and honor in the Church must be able to hold firm to the written Word of God, so that He can teach it to those he encounters.

Throughout history, these qualifications that we're discussing this semester in Quest have been used specifically to apply to pastoral leadership. In the United Methodist Church, I was required to take a preaching course in seminary, and upon being appointed to a local church, I submitted multiple sermons to be meticulously combed over and critiqued by more established colleagues. They examined my use of Scripture, whether or not my illustrations made sense, and if my jokes were funny. In short, they evaluated whether or not I was able to teach.

We certainly want our pastoral leaders to be able to teach. If they are to inspire people, help people be convicted of their sins, encourage them to turn towards Christ, and find hope in times of need, oratorical ability is absolutely essential. But does this mean that the ability to teach is just reserved for ordained leaders within a church?

I don't think so. I believe that the qualification of being able to teach is about more than preaching a Sunday morning sermon or a Wednesday evening Bible Study. I want to argue today that being able to teach is a requirement of all Christians who are worthy of honor and respect. After all, virtually everything you know today has been taught to you by someone who cared enough to impart wisdom and knowledge upon you.

As we'll see, Paul adds this to his list of requirements not to make sure that leaders have the gift of gab. In fact, Paul says virtually nothing about the public speaking abilities of these men,

whether they can turn a phrase or be captivating in front of an audience. Instead, **Paul is much more concerned about what is taught, rather than how it is taught.**

And as you look back on your life and the lessons that you have learned, I suspect many of them were not learned in a classroom or in a sanctuary. You did not learn how to solve complex problems by taking notes in high school. You did not learn how to love your wife from a professor. You did not learn how to raise your children from a textbook.

That's because some of the best lessons are not taught in classrooms; they're taught at dinner tables, over the phone, in boardrooms, on the job. And because some of the best lessons are taught outside the classroom, that means that when Paul tells us that we should be able to teach, we should not just think of a traditional teacher, presenting a lecture in front of a class. Instead, we should acknowledge the role we all have, the responsibility we have to teach what we have been taught.

Being a teacher is a high calling. **James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.** But it's also a worthy endeavor, deserving of high praise. Paul writes later in **1 Timothy 5:17: 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.** Teaching is a serious calling that is worthy of serious honor.

In order to understand what this calling is, what this mark of a remarkable man truly means, we have to first understand the purposes of teaching.

First, we teach to impart knowledge. This is the most traditional understanding of teaching. Our teachers in grade school taught us how to read and write and spell. In high school, we were taught the knowledge of biology, chemistry, algebra, and for the super brainiacs, calculus. In college, the knowledge we attain becomes a bit more specialized, learning engineering or philosophy, or if you attend the University of Alabama, I'm told that they teach you how to read and write and spell.

But when Paul lists the blueprint of a man, I don't think he's specifically calling us to teach this kind of knowledge. It is certainly an admirable profession to teach grade school or be professor at a college, but what Paul is specifically speaking to is teaching the tenets of our faith. As a man of God, you should be able to teach others that Christ is Lord, that He died as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, that the Bible contains all that is necessary for salvation.

After Jesus' resurrection, He returns to the eleven disciples. He speaks a familiar passage in **Matthew 28: 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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.** Often we stop there. But Jesus' Great Commission is not over. He adds something that I would argue is equally as important: **20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Jesus says that part of our responsibility as disciples is to teach what He has commanded us. And in order to teach these things, you must know these things. You cannot teach what you do not know. I cannot teach you how to fix a car. I cannot teach you how to start a company. I cannot teach you how to construct a building. Why? Because I have not learned these things. **A good teacher must first be a good learner.** This means that if you want to teach, if you want to be a man worthy of honor and respect, you must continually be learning. Unfortunately, in an age where we have endless pools of information in the rectangle in our pockets, many people remain intentionally ignorant of the important facts of the faith. Each year, the American Bible Society does a study of Americans' engagement with the Bible, and each year, the statistics become increasingly depressing. In their most recent study, they found that only 5% of Americans are what they describe as "Bible Centered." This means that they interact with the Bible frequently, it transforms their relationships and shapes their choices. The ABS also reports that the majority of this 5% are females.

Men, you should know enough about our faith to be able to teach it. You should possess enough knowledge to impart it upon others. You may not feel like you know enough, you may not feel ready. But that is not an excuse. I remember when my wife and I were considering starting a family, I spoke to many people and said, "We're just not ready. We don't have enough money, we don't have enough wisdom, I've never even changed a diaper before." Their advice was consistent: You will never be ready to have children. But that's not an excuse to not have them. The same is true of teaching.

The second purpose of teaching is to Pass on Values. If I were to ask you about your favorite teacher as a child or in college, I doubt you would pick the one who was the most intelligent. You would instead describe the teacher who exemplified honor, respect, and integrity. You would tell me about the teacher who cared the most. The old adage is true: **People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.**

The late poet Maya Angelou said it this way: **"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."** This is what imparting values is all about.

When it comes to the Christian faith, we must continually be passing on our values to the next generation. Values of integrity, honesty, freedom, love, self-denial, generosity, and kindness. It has been said that **Christianity is always one generation away from extinction.** All it would take for Christianity to disappear is one generation who did not take their calling as teachers seriously. That does not mean that God would no longer be real and Christ would no longer be Lord, but it does mean that people might not follow Him as they should.

Paul follows this line of logic **in Romans 10: 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?**

Our values as Christians must be passed on to the next generation, and it cannot be solely up to pastors, preachers, and church staff to accomplish this mission. You have a responsibility, through your words, your actions, and your lifestyle, to pass on the essence of our faith.

Finally, teaching, particularly in the context of 1 Timothy and Titus, is to **Correct Heresies**. If that's new language to you, a heresy is a teaching or idea that runs contrary to orthodoxy. In the days of the New Testament, heresy was rampant. Paul warns throughout his letters to the young churches about false teachers who will come and try to distort the orthodox faith. Paul speaks strongly against these teachers later in **1 Timothy 4: 1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.**

What was true about heretics in the days of the New Testament is true of heretics now: They are persuasive, they can draw a crowd, and what they say might not sound too outlandish. We must therefore be able to spot false teachers when we see them, and we should know how to respond to their arguments tactfully. **1 Peter 3: 15 In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.**

So what are the modern heresies of our day? What are the teachings that might seem correct on face value, but are actually destructive lies?

A. The Heresy of Post-Modernism/"Live Your Truth"

You might have heard this phrase thrown around, but explaining what it actually means is kinda like nailing down jello. So to understand Post-Modernism, we need to really understand Modernism. Modernism came about in the 17th century, mostly from the philosophers Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon. These thinkers believed that we should move away from allowing religious perspectives to ground our knowledge. Before this time period, if you wanted to know something, you looked towards the Church. You let the Bible, the teachings of the faith, the established norms of God create meaning. Descartes and Bacon, even though they were professing Christians, believed there was a better way.

They wanted to wipe clean our religious understanding and instead start from a blank slate to explain reality. They believed that complete objectivity was possible, that humans were capable of evaluating a situation from a "God's-eye perspective," a view from nowhere. Moreover, they believed that anyone in the world was capable of seeing things from this perspective, and believed that education could free people from their sociological, cultural, or religious understandings.

Post-Modernism rejected these ideas. That might seem positive for the Christian faith, but the way that Post-Modernism went about this task is quite dangerous. Post-Modernity argues that we cannot evaluate truth from a "God's-eye Perspective" and see things objectively, because there is **no such thing as objective truth**. This is their fundamental assumption. There is no

universal meta-narrative, there is no capitolt-t Truth. Simple truth statements such as “The sky is blue,” or “Rob has good hair,” or “Texas A&M is a superior university to the University of Alabama,” while we might all agree on these truth statements, post-moderns say they cannot be true because there is no objective truth.

While these theories in decades past were confined to the halls of philosophy departments, they have now seeped in to our everyday lives. You may hear people say, “Speak your truth,” or “That might be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” Even high-ranking politicians now speak this way. But there is no your truth and my truth; there is only THE truth.

And unfortunately, post-modernism has scratched and clawed its way into Christianity. Now, even self-avowed Christians have a hard time saying that the God of the Bible defines and is objective truth, because that might be offensive for some people.

Brothers, Post-Modernism is heresy. On face-value, it is self-defeating. The claim “There is no such thing as objective truth” must be objective truth in order for their claims to be true. Moreover, as Christians, we know that there is objective truth, and His name is Jesus Christ. We know the truth that God created the heavens and the earth. We know the truth that those who believe in Jesus will not perish, but have everlasting life. Jesus even said Himself as He was preparing to go to the cross, **John 18:37: “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”**

Our faith is truth, and we must be able to teach it as truth to combat the heresy of Post-Modernism

B. The Heresy of Universalism/Pluralism “You do you.”

This heresy arises out of many of the assumptions of post-modernity. Universalism essentially says that everyone goes to heaven, as long as they are living “their truth.” It doesn’t matter whether you believe in Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, L. Ron Hubbard, Clifford the Big Red Dog, or nothing at all, you will still go to heaven, whatever heaven may be.

Pluralism is universalism’s cousin. Pluralism says because we’re all going to the same place, we should honor and respect everyone else’s religious opinions and truths, so we should not evangelize or try to push our way of believing on anyone else. You might have heard this image of a mountain. Some will say that life and faith are like different paths up the same mountain. You may take a certain route, I may take a different route, but we all end up at the same place. This sounds nice. This sounds tolerant and accepting, but as Christians, we must acknowledge that it is simply not true.

Jesus makes this abundantly clear in **John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** In other words, you can’t get to the Father through Buddha, you can’t get to the Father through Mohammad, you can’t get to the Father

by living a good life, donating to charity, and helping old ladies across the street; you can only get to the father through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Period.

C. The Heresy of the Prosperity Gospel, “Name it and claim it.”

The Prosperity Gospel is a strain of thinking and preaching within modern Christianity, particularly modern American Christianity. This heresy is especially popular here in Texas, and particularly in Houston, where polished preachers with big smiles and private airplanes fill former sports arenas with their message. Kate Bowler, a Duke Divinity Professor and the pioneer of research into the Prosperity Gospel, defines it in this way: **“Put simply, the prosperity gospel is the belief that God grants health and wealth to those with the right kind of faith.”** In other words, these preachers and teachers say that if you believe in Jesus, if you drop a \$20 in the plate, if you live a positive life, you will never get sick, you will always be rich, you will get the right promotions, and you will be blessed.

The Prosperity Gospel is closely related to a non-Christian heresy called the Law of Attraction, which says that if you believe something will happen, it will. If you throw out enough positive energy into the universe, the universe will reward you. It’s the power of positive thinking repackaged in a modern way.

Now, let’s tackle the problems with the Prosperity Gospel from two fronts. First, let’s take their statements at face value. Is it true that if you vaguely believe in God, do good things, and think positively, your life will be amazing, your children will obey, you’ll drive a Mercedes and every light will be green? If you’ve lived for more than about 10 minutes on this planet, you know the answer is a resounding, “no.” Bad things happen to “good people” all the time. Let’s take a simple example: Jesus Christ. Pretty good guy, right? Jesus had no possessions. He had no home. His friends and family members betrayed Him. He was condemned to die and nailed to a cross. If the Prosperity Gospel is true, then it certainly didn’t work for the founder of our faith.

Jesus does not promise us what the sharply dressed, slick tongued preachers promise us. Jesus instead promises that life will be hard. In **John 16:33 He says, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** The purpose of believing in Jesus is not to make your life great. It’s not so that you have all the creature comforts of this world. It’s not so that you can be filled with happiness all the days of your life. The purpose of believing in Jesus is to give glory to God, deny yourself, preach the Gospel, acknowledge the truths of this world, and one day live eternally with Him.

But now, let’s take the inverse of the Prosperity Gospel’s claims. If good things happen to good people, what if something bad happens? Does that not necessitate that you do not have enough faith, you did not do the right things, and that you are not worthy of God’s blessings? Kate Bowler, who I mentioned earlier, wrestles with these ideas in an incredible book called “Everything Happens for a Reason...And Other Lies I’ve Loved.” Bowler was a rising star in American Christianity. She received her Master’s from Yale, her PhD from Duke, and was one of the youngest women ever offered a tenure track position at Duke, all before she turned 40. She

had spent her academic life studying the phenomenon of the Prosperity Gospel, and evaluating its so-called truths. Then, in 2015, she was diagnosed with Stage 4 Colon Cancer. Bowler was in good health, a young mother, and had no family history of cancer.

So here's a young woman at the top of her game. A believer in Jesus Christ, exposing the modern heresies of our day, living a good life. Was God punishing her? Did she not believe enough? Was she not good enough?

If the Prosperity Gospel is true, then the answer is yes. But again, the Prosperity Gospel is a lie. Bad things happen to good people. Read the book of Job. Good things happen to bad people. Read Forbes' Magazine. Karma is a lie. We live in a broken world where sin rules and reigns. Yes, God wants the best for His children, and yes, living a Christian life is the best form of living, but it will not exempt you from pain, heartache, disease, and brokenness.

D. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism/"Be good. Feel good. God exists."

Many of the previous heresies combine to form this one. No one worships at a Moralistic Therapeutic Deist temple, no one outwardly claims this as their religion or their plausibility structure. But MTD runs rampant in American Churches. This term was first introduced by the sociologist Christian Smith to describe the underlying religion of many young people in America. It's assumptions are fairly simple:

1. A creator God exists
2. God wants people to be good and moral
3. The central goal of life is to be happy
4. God does not need to be involved in our daily lives until a problem arises
5. Good people go to heaven when they die

This heresy views God as "something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he's always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."

Taking their assumptions one by one, we can agree mostly on the first two. But the last three take a sharp turn away from orthodoxy. The central goal of life is not to be happy, it is to bring glory to God. God does need to be involved in every area of our daily lives, because the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. And your goodness or badness does not determine your eternal state; your acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life does.

These heresies will arise in culture, in your family, in your workplace. The question is: Will you be bold enough to combat them? Will you be bold enough to teach the capitol-t Truth? Remember the command in 1 Peter 3, that we are called to do this with compassion and respect. Not with anger, not with name calling, but with gentle correction and genuine teaching.

When we teach the Gospel, when we teach the truths of the Bible, we don't just combat heresies, impart information, or pass on values: we acknowledge that our faith is not just about us. It's about our family. It's about our children. It's about those who believe lies or may have never heard the name of Jesus. Being able to teach shows that you take your faith seriously, and that's why it's a part of the blueprint.