



# Truth

## On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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### *Pastor, Bishop, and Elder (2)*

**Ephesians 4:11; I Timothy 3:1-2; 5:17**

**L**AST MONTH WE BEGAN A BRIEF STUDY OF THREE often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misapplied New Testament terms: **pastor**, **bishop**, and **elder**. We dealt first with the meaning of these terms and second with their identity. That brings us to one other consideration.

#### **The Chief Responsibility of This Office**

Our primary “tough text” here is I Timothy 3:2, where Paul states that one of the *qualifications* (not just *duties*) of the pastor is that he is **apt to teach**. We submit that it *is* a tough text because its real meaning and significance are often missed or simply ignored.

Those three words are actually only one word in the Greek, *didaktikos*, which appears in the New Testament only here and in 2 Timothy 2:24, where we find the same phrase. Many look at this as superficially as they do the word “desire” in verse 1 and think that anyone can do this just because he wants to (see Issue 18 of TOTT for a study of this verse and the call to ministry). But this word specifically means “*skilled in teaching*.” As one expositor puts it:

Not merely *given to* teaching, but able and skilled in it. All *might teach* to whom the Spirit imparted the gift: but *skill* in teaching was the especial office of the minister on whom would fall the ordinary duty of instruction of believers and refutation of gainsayers.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning is clear. The point is *not* that “it is a nice

quality if a pastor is a good teacher” or that “being a good teacher is certainly a plus,” rather *being a good teacher is an absolute requirement to hold that office at all*. If that quality does not exist, a man is not qualified to be a pastor, regardless of how gifted he might be in other areas. In light of our study of the “call” to the ministry, the ability to teach well is an evidence of whether or not a man is truly called. He must be a highly skilled teacher, who works hard in his studies and proclamation. Later in this letter (5:17) Paul writes:

**Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine** (emphasis added).

That is the one qualification that sets him apart from the “deacon” (who we’ll examine next month). Since the primary duty of the overseer is to preach and teach the Word of God, being gifted for that is essential.

Further, it’s crucial to note that *this qualification is the only one in the list that relates specifically to a candidate’s giftedness and function*. The implication is clear: while this leader has several duties, the primary one, and the one he *must* be specifically gifted for, is teaching.

I have heard certain preachers say, “I’m not really much of a teacher, but I sure love my flock,” and have heard certain sheep say, “Well, he’s not a good teacher, but he does have a pastor’s heart.” If I might lovingly submit, while loving God’s people is most certainly commendable, if a man is not a skilled teacher, he simply is not qualified for that ministry, for he can’t *do the*

*number one thing* his job requires. This is equivalent to a surgeon who does not know how to make an incision or a carpenter who can't use a tape measure.

It's interesting, in fact, that in that entire list of qualifications, "love" is not even mentioned, while being a skillful teacher is high on the list. Now, of course, the pastor loves the sheep, which is understood in the shepherd/sheep analogy and is certainly implied in the word "patient" (v. 3), but Paul specifically says that the candidate *must* be a good teacher. *That is his function!* Men who are not doing that today betray the office and bring shame to Christ.

Unlike today, when many pastors do everything under the sun *except* teach, Paul *repeatedly* emphasized the mandate of teaching in the Pastoral Epistles:

*1 Timothy 4:6:* If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

*11-13:* These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

*v.16:* Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

*5:17:* Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

*2 Timothy 2:24:* And the servant of the Lord must . . . be apt [skilled] to teach.

*4:1-2:* I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

*Titus 2:1:* But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.

Even a quick look at the statistics of the Pastoral Epistles, in fact, reveals how central this is. In searching for various related terms, we find the following in the Authorized Version: "teach" (9 times); "teaching" (twice); "preach" (once); "preaching" (twice); "speak" (3 times); "exhort" (8 times); "doctrine" (16 times); "rebuke" (5 times); "reprove" (once).<sup>2</sup> That is a total of at least 47 references to the teaching and preaching ministry of the pastor-teacher, bishop, and elder. Is there any doubt? Should there be any question today?

Still there are those nowadays who think other things are more important. The "minister," or whatever you prefer to call him, is viewed as part administrator,

part manager, part philanthropist, and even part entertainer. He is expected to be, and even aspires to be, "well-rounded," that is, someone who can wear many hats, including: businessman, media figure, psychologist, and philosopher. As one commentator astutely observes:

. . . many of today's ministers spend a great deal of time pastoring and shepherding in the restricted form of pastoral counseling; and few spend much time teaching. The old Scottish ministers used to go from home to home catechizing. They then had an educated congregation.<sup>3</sup>

Oh, how well that would go over in most churches today! Indeed, how few Christians today really know God's Truth. While there is not one single word of Scripture that even implies any of those other so-called "qualities" for a pastor, it makes it clear what he *must* be, from beginning to end—a *teacher*. If he has no teaching ability, if he cannot clearly convey God's truth, he does not belong in the ministry. He, in fact, is not *called* to the ministry at all, for God would not call someone who is not qualified and can be proven to be qualified by other observers.

Showing his continuing concern, the above commentator goes on to write about this qualification:

[The elder] must be "didactic." The usual translation is "apt to teach." Many elders today, as everyone knows, are not apt to teach . . . the deliberate attack on New Testament regulations shows that some denominations are apostate. They no longer are Christian churches.

Those are certainly strong words for our day, but they are true. If a church does not have preaching and teaching as the core of its ministry, and if it does not have qualified people carrying on that ministry, it is a perversion of the New Testament standard.

A direct corollary to this mandate of the pastor's primary responsibility to teach is stated in Acts 20:32: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace." The context of this verse (vs. 28-35), of course, is that Paul, in a hurry to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost, sends for the elders (pastors) of the church at Ephesus. In one of the most touching scenes in Scripture, we read the counsel and parting challenges Paul gives these dear men of God. Of the six basic responsibilities of the pastor-teacher,<sup>4</sup> the one in verse 32 involves the pastor's responsibility to *study*. "Commend" (*paratithēmi*) speaks of "a deposit, a trust." Preachers have been entrusted with the Word of God, put in charge of its use. What a responsibility this is and one we had better not take lightly!

Again we emphasize I Timothy 5:17: **Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double hon-**

**our, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.** Labor is *kopiaō*, “labor to the point of exhaustion.” This must be our approach to the study of God’s Word. Most preaching today shows the shallow study of the preacher (if he studies at all). This is so important that Paul said again in his second letter to Timothy (2:15): “Study [Old English, ‘be in a state of absorbed contemplation’] to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

So while the number one *responsibility* of the pastor is to feed the sheep, his number one *priority* must be his study time. A preacher who does not spend the majority of his “ministry time” in study and prayer will simply not be able to adequately feed his people. It is as simple as that. Today’s “seeker-sensitive,” movement where “preaching” is not preaching at all, rather “motivational speaking,” accomplishes absolutely nothing spiritual. What God demands from pastors is hours of studying Truth and then feeding it to His sheep. Harry Ironside relates an incident that perfectly illustrates the trend of our day, even though it occurred around 1935:

I listened to a widely advertised man the other day who was said to be one of the outstanding religious leaders of our day, and for nearly an hour he was telling ministers how to preach. I listened carefully, but I did not hear him quote one verse of Scripture. He quoted from Shakespeare, from George Bernard Shaw, and a number of trashy novels, and he drew his illustrations from ancient and modern literature. Yet he was supposed to be a teacher of preachers. If preachers have to listen to that kind of a teacher it is no wonder they deliver sermons that never could convert one poor sinner.<sup>5</sup>

And look where we are today! It gets harder every day to find men who are truly preaching the Word of God instead of philosophy, politics, pop-psychology, and “warm-fuzzies.” Families who have had to leave our church because of the demand of job relocation have shared with me the terrible frustration they’ve suffered in trying to find a church where the Bible is preached. I once heard pastor and author Dr. Steve Lawson say at a Bible conference that there are some families in his church (Christ Fellowship Baptist Church; Mobile, Alabama) that drive over an hour every Sunday, and even through two other towns, just to hear the Word of God expounded.

Worse is the fact that men are actually being trained to disregard preaching and teaching. Many Bible colleges, seminaries, and pastor’s conferences revolve around the latest marketing tools instead of the revealed Truth of God.

Ironside goes on to relate another trend of his day that again parallels ours. He recalls how several years

earlier a very well known American pulpit orator stated that “expository preaching is the poorest type of preaching in the world because it leaves so little scope for the imagination.” While Ironside doesn’t give the name, I strongly suspect he was referring to Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), whose philosophy of preaching changed the pulpit forever. Beecher was an orator, showman, and ad-libbed most of what he preached. He prepared his Sunday morning sermon an hour before the service and his evening sermon in the afternoon. His message was dominated by love and the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, and his delivery was nothing but drama and entertainment. Oh yes, he was enormously popular, as many are today, but he said little that was biblical. Not surprisingly, his theology got progressively more liberal until ultimately he accepted evolution and higher criticism and even rejected eternal punishment and verbal inspiration. And that is exactly what we are seeing today, a steady drift away from Scripture. Ironside is correct when he writes:

Thank God for any kind of preaching that leaves little scope for man’s imagination, for the Word of God says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Indeed, thank God for any kind of preaching that leaves man out of it. And, oh, would that pastors today recognize the mandate that God has given them!

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**In The Next Issue: *What About the Deacon and Deaconess? (Acts 6:1-6; I Tim. 3:11)***

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament* (emphasis in the original).
- <sup>2</sup> “Teach” (I Tim. 1:3; 2:12; 3:2; 4:11; 6:2, 3; II Tim. 2:2, 24; Titus 2:4); “Teaching” (Titus 1:11; 2:12); “preach” (I Tim. 4:2); “preaching” (II Tim. 4:7; Titus 1:3; “speak” (I Tim. 2:7; Titus 2:1; 2:15 [I Tim. 5:14 and Titus 3:2 not appropriate]); “exhort” (I Tim. 2:1; 6:2; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:6, 9, 15; “Doctrine” (I Tim 1:3, 10; 4:6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; II Tim. 3:10, 16; 4:2, 3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7, 10); “rebuke” (I Tim. 4:1; 5:20; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15) “reprove” (II Tim. 4:2).
- <sup>3</sup> Gordon Clark, *Ephesians* (Trinity Foundation), p. 138.
- <sup>4</sup> 1. Guard his own life and ministry (v. 28); 2. “Feed the church of God” (v. 28); 3. “Oversee,” that is, lead the sheep (v. 28); 4. Protect the sheep (vs. 29-31); 5. Study and pray (v. 32); 6. Be free of self-interest (vs. 33-35).
- <sup>5</sup> Harry Ironside, *I Corinthians* (New York: Loizeaux, 1938), pp. 407-8.

# Sermons—Their Matter

*By Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

SERMONS SHOULD HAVE REAL TEACHING IN THEM, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant. We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree, and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. Our range of subjects is all but boundless, and we cannot, therefore, be excused if our discourses are threadbare and devoid of substance. If we speak as ambassadors for God, we need never complain of want of matter, for our message is full to overflowing. The entire gospel must be presented from the pulpit; the whole faith once delivered to the saints must be proclaimed by us. The truth as it is in Jesus must be instructively declared, so that the people may not merely hear, but know, the joyful sound. We serve not at the altar of "the unknown God," but we speak to the worshippers of him of whom it is written, "they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." To divide a sermon well may be a very useful art, but how if there is nothing to divide? A mere division maker is like an excellent carver with an empty dish before him. To be able to deliver an exordium which shall be appropriate and attractive, to be at ease in speaking with propriety during the time allotted for the discourse, and to wind up with a respectable peroration, may appear to mere religious performers to be all that is requisite; but the true minister of Christ knows that the true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains. Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but as chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation. However beautiful the sower's basket it is a miserable mockery if it be without seed. The grandest discourse ever delivered is an ostentatious failure if the doctrine of the grace of God be absent from it; it sweeps over men's heads like a cloud, but it distributes no rain upon the thirsty earth; and therefore the remembrance of it to souls taught wisdom by an experience of pressing need is one of disappointment, or worse. A man's style may be as fascinating as that of the authoress of whom one said, "that she should write with a crystal pen dipped in dew upon silver paper, and use for pounce the dust of a butterfly's wing"; but to an audience whose souls are in instant jeopardy, what will mere elegance be but "altogether lighter than vanity"? Horses are not to be judged by their bells or their trappings, but by limb and bone and blood; and sermons, when criticized by judicious hearers, are largely measured by the amount of gospel truth and force of gospel spirit which they contain. Brethren, weigh your sermons. Do not retail them by the yard, but deal them out by the pound. Set no store by the quantity of words which you

utter, but strive to be esteemed for the quality of your matter. It is foolish to be lavish in words and niggardly in truth. . . .

Rousing appeals to the affections are excellent, but if they are not backed up by instruction they are a mere flash in the pan, powder consumed and no shot sent home. Rest assured that the most fervid revivalism will wear itself out in mere smoke, if it be not maintained by the fuel of teaching. The divine method is to put the law in the mind, and then write it on the heart; the judgment is enlightened, and then the passions subdued. Read Hebrews 8:10, and follow the model of the covenant of grace. Gouge's note on that place may with fitness be quoted here: — "Ministers are herein to imitate God, and, to their best endeavor, to instruct people in the mysteries of godliness, and to teach them what to believe and practice, and then to stir them up in act and deed, to do what they are instructed to do. Their labor otherwise is like to be in vain. Neglect of this course is a main cause that men fall into many errors as they do in these days." I may add that this last remark has gained more force in our times; it is among uninstructed flocks that the wolves of popery make havoc; sound teaching is the best protection from the heresies which ravage right and left among us.

Sound information upon scriptural subjects your hearers crave for, and must have. Accurate explanations of Holy Scripture they are entitled to, and if you are "an interpreter, one of a thousand," a real messenger of heaven, you will yield them plenteously. Whatever else may be present, the absence of edifying, instructive truth, like the absence of flour from bread, will be fatal. Estimated by their solid contents rather than their superficial area, many sermons are very poor specimens of godly discourse. I believe the remark is too well grounded that if you attend to a lecturer on astronomy or geology, during a short course you will obtain a tolerably clear view of his system; but if you listen, not only for twelve months, but for twelve years, to the common run of preachers, you will not arrive at anything like an idea of their system of theology. If it be so, it is a grievous fault, which cannot be too much deplored. Alas! the indistinct utterances of many concerning the grandest of eternal realities, and the dimness of thought in others with regard to fundamental truths, have given too much occasion for the criticism! Brethren, if you are not theologians you are in your pastorates just nothing at all. You may be fine rhetoricians, and be rich in polished sentences; but without knowledge of the gospel, and aptness to teach it, you are but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Verbiage is too often the fig-leaf which

does duty as a covering for theological ignorance. Sounding periods are offered instead of sound doctrine, and rhetorical flourishes in the place of robust thought. Such things ought not to be. The abounding of empty declamation, and the absence of food for the soul, will turn a pulpit into a box of bombast, and inspire contempt instead of reverence. Unless we are instructive preachers, and really feed the people, we may be great quoters

of elegant poetry, and mighty retailers of second-hand windbags, but we shall be like Nero of old, fiddling while Rome was burning, and sending vessels to Alexandria to fetch sand for the arena while the populace starved for want of corn.

[Opening paragraphs of chapter 5, "Sermons—Their Matter," in *Lectures to My Students*.]

Charles H. Spurgeon dared to say, "Many would unite church and stage, cards and prayer, dancing and sacraments. If we are powerless to stem this torrent, we can at least warn men of its existence and entreat them to stay out of it." A. J. Gordon dared to say, "The notion having grown up that we must entertain men in order to win them to Christ, every invention for world-pleasing which human ingenuity can devise has been brought forward till the churches have been turned into play-houses and there is hardly a carnal amusement that can be named from billiards to dancing which does not find a nesting place in Christian sanctuaries. Is it then Pharisaism or pessimism . . . to predict that at the present fearful rate of progress, the close of this [twentieth] century may see the Protestant church as completely assimilated to fourth-century paganism?" We smile at that today, but we are not overstocked with Spurgeons and Gordons.

Vance Havner  
*Pepper and Salt*, p. 115

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This monthly publication is intended to address Scriptures that have historically been debated, are particularly difficult to understand, or have generated questions among Believers. We hope it will be an encouragement and challenge to God's people to carefully examine and discern Truth. Periodically, we will also include book reviews of popular books, for much that is published today demands discerning reading. While the positions presented here are based on years of careful Biblical research, we recognize that other respected men of God differ.

If you have a question that perplexes you, please send it along so that we might address it either in an article or in our "Q & A" section. Other comments are also warmly welcomed.

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