

A TEACHING CHURCH

Slide #1: A Teaching Church

This year we've started off preaching about the different ways God equips us in this body to build each other up.

Slide #2: Ephesians 4:11-13

11 And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and **teachers, 12 for the equipping of the [e]saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; 13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Our pastors / guest speakers have shared on the following:-

- Apostolic church = relational church, missional church, experiential church;
- Pastoral church = a pastor cares, pastor protects, a pastor unites
- Prophetic church = weak people to called out to tell forth and declare God's truth and wisdom

So what does a **Teaching Church** look like?

Today I really only have four points. **[Slide #3] When, Why teach, what to teach, and how to teach.**

But before I do that, I want to do a quick survey.

Who here thinks they are an apostle in this body? Prophet? Evangelist? Pastor? Teacher?

Hence:- **when** do we teach?

1. When do we teach? [Slide #4]

Firstly, when one reads Ephesians 4:11, it talks about pastors and teachers in one breath. Many commentators look at this and say - ah well Paul is talking about teaching in the context of the role of the pastor and vice versa.

So I guess that means for all of you here who are not pastors, this sermon doesn't really apply? This would be the shortest sermon ever - done in a record time of 3 minutes!

You'll be glad to know that I have another 30 minutes to go, because this very much applies to many of us.

Because, whilst pastors are expected to be able to teach, there are many teachers who are not gifted as pastors. There is a distinction, however, between the pastoral work of preaching, and what is expected of a teacher.

Take for example, elsewhere in Ephesians, Paul describes the act of preaching as a declaration of God's truth in Jesus.

Other people have described preaching as - the *explanation and application of the word in the assembled congregation of Christ*. Others have said that preaching is the delivery of God's word by a congregation leader, in order to lead the congregation to an encounter with Christ.

Obviously, a preacher will, therefore, need to be able to teach and explain God's word, not just in the pulpit, but also with us on a more personal level as well.

Teaching, however, is quite different in practice. Usually, this involves the analysis of the Word of God - explaining the meaning, the context, and application to the hearer's life. A teacher is expected to clearly instruct and communicate knowledge, specifically the doctrines of our faith and biblical truths.

It should also be obvious why preaching and teaching are different. Let's take today's sermon for example. I have a 30-45 minute slot to expound, to exhort, to declare, and to encourage you in God's truth. Maybe you'll be inspired and encouraged after today's message.

But what really helps it stick in your mind, and in your heart, is to really study God's truth together. That's why House Church isn't a time to read books or hang out. Its not intended to be a mere social gathering. It is actually supposed to be a time to discuss and meditate over the Sunday message and to have the fellowship leaders break it down and study the sermon and God's word systematically.

Even outside of House Church, the gift of teaching, is used in many of our ministries:-

- SP Kids, Youth
- Bible study (Word ministry)
- Seminaries
- Even in certain ministries, like Egape, Alpha, sometimes during outreach
- I dare say, even during worship. What songs we sing, the content of the lyrics, could affect how we understand God and praise God with our lips.
- In fact, there are very few ministries where teaching is not involved.

And the reason why almost all ministries involve some form of teaching, its because **every Christian** is commanded to teach, one way or another. In fact, the Great Commission at the end of the book of Matthew (Matthew 28) commands each and every single one of us to make disciples of all nations, and to **teach the nations all that Jesus had commanded us**.

Elsewhere, Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 3:16, All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for **teaching**, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness. So any one here who reads Scripture already has the tools to **teach**.

So whilst there may be different roles in church requiring different levels and depths of teaching, it almost superfluous for me to call a church a “teaching” church. Because, by its very nature, a church is teaching at every level and opportunity.

The more important questions are the ones we will look at today. **Why** must we teach, and what happens if we don't? **What** do we teach, and what happens if we teach something wrong? **How** do we teach, and what happens if we teach with the wrong approach or motive?

Before I continue, I know that some of you here consider yourselves only as students of the Word. Yes, if you are new to the faith, that is indeed the case. But Paul here is talking about how the church is grown in maturity. And the church, and we, certainly cannot grow if we remain merely as students. God's truth needs to be studied **and taught - by you and me, one way or another**. And this is why...

2. Why teach - and what happens if we don't? [Slide #5]

Recently, like half of Hong Kong, we were in Japan for our family trip over CNY. Its my kids first time in Tokyo, and their first time ever seeing snow, so we were super excited.

My children have never skied before, so they were all put in the beginners class with other kids who were under 10 years old. My kids had back to back classes and they assigned different teachers every class.

So in my son's 2nd class with a new teacher, obviously the new teacher did not know whether my son was any good, or how hard the teacher could push them. So my son took the initiative, waltzed up confidently to the teacher, and told him - “I'm actually really good at skiing”. He then followed up by saying, “But, I think I need some help putting on my boots”.

So after we were done skiing, we were eating at a restaurant. My son then turns to me and says that he actually speaks some Japanese. This of course is a surprise to me since my wife and I don't speak Japanese. Without skipping a beat, he then swiftly turned to a Japanese waiter near him and said “Ohio (like Ohio state)”. Then, when the waiter spoke to him in rapid Japanese, like any good tourist, my son replied, “do you speak in English?”.

So when he returned to the table, I asked him what he wanted to say, and he said Good morning, Good day, i.e. Ohayoo. I asked him where he was learning his Japanese, and his one word response was, “Duolingo”.

Now, as amazing an app Duolingo is, one thing I would quite confidently say it is certainly not a replacement for a good language teacher.

Now some of you may or may not recall that 2 years ago I shared on the Spiritual Discipline of Study (24 July 2022). In that sermon, I preached about the importance of the discipline of studying God’s word and studying God’s truth.

In many ways, I feel it is a full circle that I am asked to share on the gift of being a teacher, because however well intentioned a student we may be, like my son, without a good teacher much of the efforts as a student may very well be misdirected, or altogether wasted. I’m sure many of us will learn little things here and there from books, from YouTube, from apps, but there is nothing quite like having an engaging lesson with a good teacher.

Scripture actually makes it clear precisely why we need a good teacher in our lives. Let me illustrate this to you by way of one of my favourite Psalms, Psalm 19.

Slides #6-7 - Psalm 19:1-6

19

The heavens tell of the glory of God;
And their expanse declares the work of His hands.

2

Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.

3

There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.

4

Their [\[a\]](#)line has gone out into all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them He has placed a tent for the sun,

5

Which is like a groom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices like a strong person to run his course.

6

Its rising is from [\[b\]](#)one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the [\[c\]](#)other end of them;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

These verses tell us that the heavens somehow show us something about God's glory. Even Paul writes about this in Romans 1:20 - His eternal power and divine nature has been shown since the creation of the world (Romans 1:20).

There are even worship songs which talk about God's majesty in natural creation.

Chris Tomlin, in his worship song, "Indescribable", says:

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creation's revealing Your majesty

The problem, however, is that many of us actually cannot know God simply by observing nature, as majestic, as grand, and as beautiful as it is. If I were to ask you to look at the recent LA fires, earthquakes, or volcano eruptions, what can one possibly know about God except that He is powerful and destructive? When loved ones are struggling financially, when family members are afflicted with cancer, or when children die at a young age, how can one perceive God is a God of love in these instances?

This is because, we know, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, our minds are naturally unable to perceive and understand things about God. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that **14** ... a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

That's why we need someone to **TEACH us God's heart. To TEACH us God's mind. To TEACH us God's truth.**

Our faith in God comes from **hearing** the word of Christ, and not simply from observing God's creation. Our faith in God comes from **hearing** God's commands and express promises, not simply from observing or reacting to the circumstances around us. As God repeatedly tells us - He who has ears, let him hear [Matthew 11:15].

So why teach? Because we're naturally **dumb** and **numb**, when it comes to matters about God.

So what happens if we don't teach? Well, Paul in Ephesians 4:14-16 says this **[Slide #8]**, if we **don't** teach, we would be "*tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people*". In Colossians 2:8, he gives a similar warning **[Slide #9]** - "*See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.*"

Paul knew that our hearts are fickle and that we are easily persuaded by many worldly teachings, worldly philosophies, and worldly traditions. So, once we understand just how important teaching is to the life of a Christian in this body, the next pressing question is - **what do we teach? And what happens if it is wrong?**

3. What to teach? [Slide #10]

Let me start by way of an illustration.

[Slide #11]

Today Christians ... stand at the head of [this country]... I pledge that I never will tie myself to parties who want to destroy Christianity .. We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit ... We want to burn out all the recent immoral developments in literature, in the theater, and in the press - in short, we want to burn out the **poison of immorality** which has entered into our whole life and culture as a result of **liberal excess** during the past ... (few) years.

- Adolf Hitler, quoted in: *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, 1922-1939*, Vol. 1 (London, Oxford University Press, 1942), pg. 871-872

Imagine if one of our pastors or leaders or even a leader in government said this. Would you wholeheartedly agree with this?

Does anyone know who said this?

This lofty and eloquent speech is just one of many that led to the Nazi party convincing many Christians in Germany to put them into power. Quite simply the Christians were led away by a wolf in sheep's clothing, by a false teacher. What happens is that no gospel is taught. What Hitler taught was **a divine power which would suppress those who disagreed with him**. A **man-made religion** that somehow justified the massacre of the Jews. The "gospel" that Hitler preached, was an oppressive one that revealed his true intention - i.e. a gospel that would lead his tribe to stand on the corpses others, and not one that leads anyone with repentance to the feet of Jesus.

What about this quotation [Slide #12]

- God loves us no matter what we do

I've heard people say this in different Christian circles. Would you agree?

Now, I appreciate this is a very short quote. There is very little context. But on the face of it, it is surely not wrong? Of course, God loved us while we were sinners. So surely this is right?

This type of pithy saying opens up all sorts of wrong thinking and wrong teaching. Because it teaches that God's grace is cheap. God might have forgiven us of our sins and our debts, but it doesn't matter if we hold our grudges against others. God might have done an amazing work in transforming our lives, but it doesn't matter if we choose not to minister and present the transformative power of the gospel to others.

In fact, the more we learn from Scripture, the more we know that what we do matters a lot! Do you know that if we hold onto our grudges, when we pray to God, he won't forgive us our offences?

[Slide #13]

Mark 11:25-26:-

24 Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* to you. **25** And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you for your offenses. **26** [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your offenses.”]

Romans 2:4:- [4] Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

These verses teach us that God may not answer our prayers if we do not forgive others. Why? Because God's love towards us is supposed to lead to action, not idle faith!

This is why God actually holds those of us who teach at a higher level of accountability. False teaching can have very serious ramifications. Let me give you an example.

- Friends episode (free channel)
- Affected the way they view women
- We joke about this, but this has realistic consequences.
- Bad teaching is when such wrong understanding of women is not corrected. Young men carry these unrealistic expectations, body image expectations, and intimacy-on-demand expectations into their marriages.
- Bad teaching is when we have wrong understanding of God, expectations, and desires that we expect God to fulfil. What ends up happening is that we worship a self-tailored version of Jesus. No wonder Jesus would say to such people, “*Depart from me for I never knew you!*” [Matthew 7:21-23]

We learn this from James 3:1:- we *who are teachers* will incur a [a](#) stricter judgment.

If you read on in James 3, it says that the power of the tongue should not be undermined. He uses an analogy that a great forest can be set aflame by even a small fire, and that the tongue is like such a fire. He says the tongue is basically capable of restless evil, full of deadly poison, but - the same tongue that has the power to curse, also has the ability to bless God and others.

When you get to the end of the chapter, you then realise that James is talking about how dangerous it is to be a teacher when one is filled with bitter jealousy, with selfish ambition, with arrogance. This affects **how** we teach and **what** we teach.

Now let's look at what happens when God's truth is faithfully, and purely, taught.

Look at the 2nd half of **Psalm 19:7-13. [Slides #14-15]**

7 The Law of the LORD is [a](#) perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much pure gold;
Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, Your servant is warned by them;
In keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*.
13 Also keep Your servant back from presumptuous *sins*;
Let them not rule over me;
Then I will be innocent,
And I will be blameless of great wrongdoing.

These verses come right after David describes the majesty of God's creation. It's almost like David is recognising that creation cannot offer any of the things that God's law, God's precepts, God's commandments, can give. As I said earlier, there is no way we can understand God's character from just observing His creation and circumstances around us.

But when God's words are faithfully taught, it should **restore the soul, make you wise, helps you rejoice, enlightens your eye, purifies your heart**. It can prevent sins from ruling over us.

When faithfully taught, God's word should be a transformative experience that affects us in our hearts, our minds, and our spirits!

Now that is why the church has such a need for members, you and I, to hold onto, and to disseminate, **faithful** teaching. **Faithful** teaching protects us from worldly philosophies. It can

help us to detect lies and wolves in sheep's clothing. It should aid us in discerning whether we are worshipping idols and false teachers, rather than Jesus Himself.

4. How to teach? [Slide #16]

[Share story about English teacher/mentor when the language was unlocked and how I was transformed [Dickens etc vs Hobbit]. Subject was no longer a puzzle but a pleasure.

I was then mentored and taught in university by a brother who, to this day, is still very much my mentor.

Cherished memories]

None of these people were "specialists". Yet, they were far more impactful than any "professional" teacher or "professional" theologian. God sent these people into my life, at the right time and the right season.

What made them particularly memorable to me, is that I knew they were all still learning themselves. That as much as they were teachers and mentors to me, that they too were learning at the feet of Jesus through their own teachers and mentors.

Now I am incredibly humbled to be granted time and space to share this message from the pulpit. I recognise that I'm still (relatively) young and still learning the ways of God and of the world. Every time I come up here, I am at risk of saying or sharing something that is periphery to the gospel, or that may contradict the gospel. I may even share something that may appear faithful, whilst my heart is filled with selfish ambition or personal agenda. Am I doing this for more recognition? For more worldly exposure? Or am I truly serving this congregation both in and out of the pulpit, even when I'm not seen in the spotlight?

If there is one common pattern of someone who abuses his or her role as a teacher, is one who begins to hoard the glory of teaching and has no real accountability regarding what he or she teaches, or no humility in being corrected or wanting to learn more.

[Meeting with client - sharing what he remembered]

If we want to see better teaching at this church, more faithful teaching, then all of us who teach - wherever we are, whatever ministry we're in, we need to be open to receiving critical feedback. We need to have open and transparent discussions regarding our own teachings, and teachings of others. Why? Because it is pure and faithful teachings which are supposed to give us LIFE and help us to DISCERN evil and to prevent SIN from ruling over us. So - we shouldn't settle for less!

Stakes are high. False teaching, misguided teaching, can be like a tongue that poisons.

As a teacher, we need to be humble - always ready to learn, and ready to be taught.

Slide 17: A teaching church is a teachable church

[RESPONSE]

Declarations:-

- We shouldn't have to settle for "skim-milk" teaching when God knows we should be feeding on solid food. Its time that we start eating some spiritual meat this year. Many of us have been lethargic, even with coming to service, even with going to HC, even with doing ministry.
- Its time that we start encouraging each other in Jesus and giving each other Words of truth and even explaining Words of truth to each other. Its time that we spend more time with brothers and sisters rooted in Jesus, not with people who give us fluff and worldly advices. Its time we surround ourselves with **humble teachers of God's word**.
- Its time that we say no to bad teaching, give no space to human philosophies, and help each other to have a stronger understanding and faith in Jesus.
- We shouldn't have to settle for teachers who have no integrity. Who have no accountability.
- We shouldn't have to settle for half truths, prosperity gospels, or be part of a body that shies away from difficult Bible verses or controversial topics.
- We need to **surrender** to faithful teaching, and allow God's word to transform our hearts and minds.

Let's go back to Psalm 19 - last verse:- **Psalm 19:14 [Slide 18]**

Psalm 19:

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Remember, David was writing this as a King of Israel. He himself is a leader - the most pre-eminent of leaders in ancient history. We are still talking about him today not merely as a king, but a psalmist, a teacher, whose writings underpin many of our doctrines about the Gospel and about God's character.

Despite being a great teacher of God's truth, he was above all someone who stayed humble before God. That is what makes his teachings and writings so alluring, so generational - not because of his intellect, but because he fearfully and faithfully held onto and shared God's truths.

[RESPONSE:]

- **REPENT of having an overfamiliar heart. An unteachable heart.**
- **REPENT for not taking up the mantle to use our tongue to teach, to bless.**
- **REPENT for settling for less, for feeding our spirit with bad food.**

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