



Healthy Church

Session 6: Preaching and Teaching

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Today we're looking at the role of teaching in the life of a healthy church. Whether it's preaching from the pulpit or teaching in a Connect Group, handling God's Word carefully and faithfully is central to who we are as a church.

The International Mission Board, in training its future church planters, says, "the church regards the Bible as the supreme, controlling authority over all it believes and does, and faithful Bible teaching saturates the life of a healthy church. A healthy church holds to the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, and clarity of Scripture, and interprets each text of the Bible responsibly in context, according to the norms of grammatical/historical interpretation."

International Mission Board, "Foundations," vol. 4, 2022, https://issuu.com/trainingdev/docs/imb_foundations.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Acts 2:36-37; 17:1-4,10-12; 18:24-26

THE MAIN IDEA

A healthy church holds Christ and His Word as central in our hearts, in our pulpit, and in our small group Bible Study. When individual members commit to the personal study of God's Word, when the pastors commit to the careful exposition of God's Word, and when Connect groups commit to the faithful study of God's Word in community, Christ is honored and the Church grows in the wisdom and knowledge of God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What role does the Bible have in your everyday life? How could you grow in personal study of God's Word this week?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Acts 2:36-37 When Peter addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost, he used Old Testament Scripture to show Jesus is the Messiah. As people heard the faithful teaching of God's Word, they were convicted of their sin and turned to Jesus. God's Word changes hearts, and when we spend time in His Word, we grow in discipleship and service to Him. The Holy Spirit helps us understand and apply God's Word in our lives.

Acts 17:1-4 When Paul preached God's Word in Thessalonica, people came to know Christ. The role of a pastor is to faithfully preach the entirety of God's Word so people can hear, believe, and respond to the fullness of Christ's invitation to salvation and learn to live in obedience to Him.

Acts 17:10-12; 18:24-26 Believers should gather regularly to study God's Word. More than a support group or prayer circle, small group discipleship happens when believers open the Bible together, learning from and challenging one another to follow Christ.



START HERE

We live in the greatest time in history for access to God's Word and biblical teaching. With a free app, we can read hundreds of translations of Scripture in languages around the world. We can watch some of the most well-known preachers in our generation on our televisions or phones, and we can access resources like never before to understand the Bible. A healthy church is built on the teaching of God's Word. Today, as we unpack examples from the book of Acts, look for ways the apostles, church leaders, and individual believers made the teaching of Scripture a priority in their lives so that we might do the same.

DISCUSS

What role does biblical teaching play in your everyday life? Could you explain to someone what's important to you about learning Scripture?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Christ and His Word should be central in our hearts.

Acts 2:36-37: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"*

Unpacking Acts 2:36-37

Today, we can plug any address into our phones or dashboards and get turn-by-turn directions wherever we want to go, with traffic updates. Think back fifteen years. If you wanted to know how to get somewhere, you went to a website, put in the address, printed out the directions, and took them with you in your car. Ten years before that? You probably had a city map, or even an atlas, to tell you how to get there. And a century before that, you wouldn't have had a car, but you might have used a compass or even the sun and stars to guide your way.

Throughout time, people have needed something tangible to help them get from Point A to Point B. Without clear directions, we would all wander about, unable to move far beyond what we know. The same is true spiritually. Without clear direction, our lives would wander far from the abundant life God has for us. In Matthew 9:36, we read of Jesus, "When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd." Christ has compassion for us, knowing that without Him, we would waste our lives, distressed and dejected, wandering away from Him.

But how do we come to access the roadmap for living? How will we know if we are on the right path? For believers, we have both a map and an internal GPS to help us navigate life. Our map is Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may



be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Bible is not just a collection of stories and wisdom. It is the very words of God for us to know Him and to instruct us in living.

We are to learn God’s Word together as a body and study it personally. God’s Word is central in our preaching and teaching, but it should also be central in our hearts.

In Acts 2, Peter addressed a large crowd of Jews from all over the world who were gathered in Jerusalem. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they heard and received the gospel message. Peter used Old Testament Scripture from the prophet Joel and King David in the Psalms to display Jesus as the promised Messiah who lived, died, was resurrected, and now offers salvation to all who believe. When the crowd heard his message, they were “pierced to the heart” (v. 37) and wanted to know how to be saved.

Biblical teaching is one of the primary means by which we encounter the living God. If you think back to your own conversion story, you can likely identify a sermon, teaching, summer camp lesson, or revival service where God’s Word was preached, and it pierced your heart for the first time. While testimonies, worship songs, and other religious teachings can and do help us draw near to God, the proclaimed Word is the primary tool God uses to reach and teach us about Him.

The crowd in Acts 2 heard the Scripture and desired to follow Christ. When they asked Peter, “What should we do?” (v. 37), he answered, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). If Scripture is our external map, the Holy Spirit is our internal GPS, the gift of God for all who believe. In John 16, before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus taught the disciples about the Holy Spirit, saying, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come” (*John 16:13*). Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to apply biblical teaching to our hearts and lives so we are transformed more into the likeness of Jesus.

As a church, we need Scripture-filled preaching and teaching alongside our personal study of the Word. When God’s Word is central in our hearts, we gather with the church filled by the Spirit and ready to grow together as members of the body of Christ.

DISCUSS

- *What can we learn from the fact that Peter’s primary means of proclaiming Jesus was pointing to the promises found in God’s Word about Him?*
- *Why is it important that we hear the Word of God taught and that we study it personally?*
- *How has your testimony been impacted by faithful teaching and preaching?*



2. God's Word should be central in our pulpit.

Acts 17:1-4: *"After they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.' Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women."*

Unpacking Acts 17:1-4

Imagine you come to church this Sunday, sit down in the sanctuary, and instead of the usual setup, you see only a large, red circle. Dr. Hébert steps into the center, starts an eighteen-minute timer, and begins to deliver not a sermon, but a TED Talk. In a TED Talk, effective communicators step into the red circle and give the speech of a lifetime. Their goal is to inspire, educate, and entertain, and people from around the world flock to hear their ideas. No doubt Dr. Hébert's TED Talk would be the same: inspiring, educational, and entertaining—but that wouldn't make it a sermon. A well-crafted speech isn't the same as preaching. So, what's the difference between speaking and preaching, and why is healthy preaching one of the markers of a healthy church?

Charles Spurgeon, who pastored Metropolitan Tabernacle in England for thirty-eight years, wrote that "true preaching" is made up of "adoration of God by the manifestation of his gracious attributes." Preaching is sharing the Gospel of Jesus, "which preeminently glorifies him."¹ Unlike a TED Talk, where the speaker brings his or her passion and expertise to the audience, a pastor brings not just personal thoughts and anecdotes, but a careful exposition of God's Word to God's people. Preaching is more than a carefully crafted speech—it is an opportunity to serve and glorify God by carefully laying out Scripture for the church to hear and respond.

In Acts chapter 17, we see an example of the role of preaching in the life of the church. The chapter follows Paul and Silas being released from prison in Philippi, moving on to Thessalonica, and preaching in a Jewish synagogue. *"As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead"* (Acts 17:2-3). Notice the content of Paul's sermon—the Scriptures. This is the heart of biblical preaching. Nothing indicates that Paul retold the harrowing tale of his and Silas' release from prison, although it could have made an excellent story. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gave the focus of his preaching throughout his ministry: *"But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength"* (1 Corinthians 1:23-25).

Paul preached Jesus thoughtfully and scripturally. Throughout Scripture, God used prophets and pastors to communicate His Word to His people. In Nehemiah 8, after the Word of God was discovered in the temple ruins and brought to the prophet Ezra, all of Israel gathered to hear it



read. Scripture says that Ezra opened God's Word and read it to the people from morning until noon. Then, Levite priests helped the people interpret what it said (Nehemiah 8:7-8). Like the Levite priests, pastors today read and interpret God's Word so church members can understand the Bible and apply it to their lives.

One of the pastor's primary disciplines is ensuring that the church is taught the full breadth of God's Word. Expository preaching, rather than topical preaching, happens when a pastor takes a single text of Scripture, unpacking it verse by verse, to glean all the text's meaning and wisdom. Rather than skipping around, the pastor should deal with each verse in a text, challenging or unpopular as it may seem, so that God's people receive careful instruction. More than that, a pastor committed to expository teaching is careful to cover the Bible from cover to cover. Timothy Keller once said, "Expository preaching is the best method for displaying and conveying your conviction that the whole Bible is true."²

In Acts 17, Paul spent three days carefully preaching the Gospel to the people in Thessalonica, "explaining and proving" (v. 3) that Jesus is the Messiah. What was the result? Acts 17:4 says, "Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women." When God's Word is carefully and thoroughly preached, people come to know Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Scripture is the center of preaching, sermons are the wisdom of God poured out for His people. Pastor Tony Merida comments, "The general understanding is that the text of Scripture drives expositional preaching. The Bible is at center stage . . . exposition deals with the in-depth study of the text for the purpose of communicating the message the original author intended."³

When the people in Thessalonica heard Paul's preaching, they walked away having been introduced to an extraordinary Savior. The same is true for the church today. Preaching is an opportunity to hear from God, to submit to the teaching of His Word, and to apply it to our lives. When we do that, God is glorified, the church is strengthened, and people come to know Christ.

DISCUSS

- *Where might you need to be challenged regarding your value of the preached Word?*
- *How does expository preaching in particular help the church grow in discipleship?*
- *How can we position ourselves to receive faithful teaching of the Word?*



ADDING CLARITY

Preaching and teaching are both vital ministries of the church, but they are not the same. Seminary professor Jonathan Pennington helps us distinguish the two:

“We can define preaching as the invitational and exhortational proclamation of biblical and theological truth. Teaching, by contrast, is the explanation and explication of biblical and theological truth.

What is shared between Christian preaching and teaching is the content—biblical and theological truth. The difference lies in the mode and immediate goal.

Preaching is biblical and theological content selected and presented in a mode of proclamation with the immediate goal of invitation and exhortation.

Teaching is biblical and theological content presented in a more detailed and systematic way for the purpose of explaining and unpacking complex issues, their interconnectedness, and their implications. There is overlap, but there is also distinction.”⁴

3. God’s Word should be central in our study.

Acts 17:10-12: As soon as it was night, the brothers and sisters sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. Upon arrival, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Consequently, many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men.

Acts 18:24-26: Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus, although he knew only John’s baptism. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately.

Unpacking Acts 17:10-12 and Acts 18:24-26

As we continue reading Acts 17, we find that Paul and Silas’s ministry in Thessalonica was short-lived. As people put their faith in Christ, the local Jewish leaders incited a mob to riot against them. As a result, the local believers helped Paul and Silas leave town in the night. Undeterred, they traveled to Berea, approximately forty-five miles away, and immediately began to teach in the synagogue.

The Berean Jews responded to the gospel enthusiastically and examined the Old Testament Scriptures daily to determine the validity of the missionaries’ teaching. God’s Word should be



central in our study. When believers come together in a small group Bible Study setting, their primary focus should be Scripture. The Berean Jews had enough foundational knowledge of God's Word that when they were presented with a new idea, they had the ability to discern the reliability of the message, not by instinct or opinion, but by examining what the Word of God had to say.

When we come to Connect Groups, what is the primary focus of our time together? While there is a place for fellowship, sharing prayer requests, and updating each other on our lives and families, the primary goal is to study God's Word together in community. In biblical times, young boys would have studied the Scriptures together in Hebrew school. In eighteenth-century England, protestants began Sunday School as a way to educate protestant children. Today, small groups help us to live out God's Word in community with others. As Tessa Morrell said in an article on Lifeway Voices, "When we read and study the same passage of Scripture together, we can hold one another accountable to an accurate understanding of the text. We can also hold one another accountable for the faithful application of the text in daily life. As we discuss real-life scenarios where we can apply what we're learning, members of the group can pray for and follow up on steps taken to obey."⁵ Like the Berean Jews, studying God's Word in community helps us to learn together and discern truth.

In Acts 18:24-26, we see another example of the benefit of studying Scripture in community. Earlier in the chapter, we find that Paul traveled with others preaching and teaching God's Word, but never staying too long in one place. Because of the missionary calling on Paul, he often secured leaders for a local church before moving to the next town. In Ephesus, he left behind two leaders, Aquilla and his wife, Priscilla. In the text, an eloquent young evangelist named Apollos came to the town to preach the good news of Jesus. While he was an enthusiastic and compelling speaker, he lacked correct theology about the nature of a believer's baptism. Acts 18:27 says, "After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately."

This text beautifully illustrates one benefit of right teaching—the ability to help one another understand God's Word more accurately. The text goes on to say that from there Apollos traveled on to Achaia, where his ministry was a blessing to others. No one person can understand the entirety of the Bible alone. Pastors consult commentaries, dictionaries, and the teaching of other preachers to make sure their teaching aligns with Scripture. In Connect Groups, people have the chance to open God's Word together, learn from one another, and gently correct misunderstandings.

When Connect Groups gather, not only is it important to use our time to study God's Word, but it's also important to teach accurately from the text and not opinion. Over time, philosophies, political views, ideologies, and opinions can all change, but God's Word remains the same. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." When we gather, the question we should ask is not, "What does so-and-so teacher say, or what does my pastor say, or even what do I say?" The question we need to ask is, "What



does God's Word say?" When we make God's Word central to our teaching, we help each other grow in wisdom and understanding of God's Word and His purposes for our lives.

DISCUSS

- *How did the Berean Jews demonstrate a commitment to Scripture?*
- *Why do you think it was important that Aquilla and Priscilla addressed Apollos's incorrect teaching?*
- *Is your preparation and participation in your Connect Group based on God's Word over human opinion? How might we grow in this?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

Jesus came so that we might be saved. In Romans 10:17, we read that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (NKJV). When Scripture is central in our hearts, central in our pulpit, and central in our groups, then Christ is proclaimed and people come to know Him. For believers, the ongoing reception of God's Word in our personal Bible Study, in the weekly sermon, and in our small group helps us to grow in biblical wisdom and build our lives on the foundation of Christ's enduring Word (Matthew 7:24).

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *What does your personal Bible Study practice look like? Is there an opportunity to re-engage in God's Word in a fresh way this week?*
- *How do you approach listening to the sermon? Do you come to worship expecting to hear a Word from God? Why or why not?*
- *How can you seek to grow as a student of those who preach and teach in our church?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

The early church grew when Scripture was preached faithfully in both large and small group settings. The same is true today. The church grows when the Bible is central to our teaching and preaching. How can you make the Bible central in your life this week?



APPLY

In Eugene Peterson's *Eat This Book*, he encourages the body of believers to feast daily on God's Word. What would need to change in your day-to-day and Sunday experience to approach God's Word as a feast to be enjoyed?

REFERENCES

¹ Drew Tillman, "12 Spurgeon Quotes on Preaching," *Midwestern* 47, (2024): 57.

² Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 32.

³ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.

⁴ Jonathan T. Pennington, "What's the Difference between Preaching and Teaching," Logos, July 18, 2022, <https://www.logos.com/grow/what-is-the-difference-between-preaching-and-teaching/>.

⁵ Tessa Morrell, "Why Studying Scripture in a Group Is Vital for Believers," Lifeway Voices, December 16, 2020, <https://voices.lifeway.com/church-ministry-leadership/why-studying-scripture-in-a-group-is-vital-for-all-believers/>.