



Course Name: The Shepherd and the Word

By Tommy South

Course description:

This course builds on previous classes to examine the relationship of the shepherd to God's Word. The main focus of the class will be to examine the need for and ability of shepherds to teach. In this class, students will dig more deeply into this biblical teaching and its application for the church today.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have...

- A. Explored the meaning and application of the shepherd's qualification "able to teach."
- B. Focused their attention on where the knowledge comes from for this qualification.
- C. Discussed the importance of the shepherd's ability to teach in his home, on his job, in the community, and the congregation.

Outline of the class:

- A. During the first few minutes of the class divide the class into groups of three or four. Then ask each table to take 15-20 minutes to discuss the following.
 1. Based on your current understanding, write out what "able to teach" means for someone to be a shepherd.
 2. How will someone obtain the knowledge and/or skill to teach?
 3. What can be done within the congregation to achieve this ability?
- B. Introduction
 1. "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:7-8).
 2. Anyone desiring to be a leader of God's people must be steeped in the teachings of scripture and allow those teachings to guide him in all that he does. Carefully adhering to God's Word will ensure success in leadership. Not doing so will ensure failure.
- C. The two sets of listed qualifications for shepherds require the ability to teach, and the ability to teach assumes a good knowledge of the Word.

1. 1 Timothy 3:2 – Along with the requirements to be “above reproach,” the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled,” etc., an overseer must be “able to teach.”
 - a. Being “able” suggests both the *desire* and the *ability* to teach. Some desire to teach, but do not have the ability. Others have the ability, but not the desire. A good shepherd must have both.
 - b. In our time, most of the teaching in churches is left to preachers, whether they are shepherds or not, and to others who may not be elders.
 - c. The reasoning usually is that the elders are overseeing the teaching, but not doing it themselves.
 - d. In the New Testament, teaching the church is primarily the responsibility of elders. Others can and will teach also (Romans 12:7), but shepherds are *required* to be teachers. This is not a responsibility that can simply be delegated to others.

- D. Titus 1:9 – “He 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.”
 1. “Holding firm” to the word implies both knowing it and being convinced of its truthfulness and usefulness in all spiritual matters (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 2. The purpose of having elders who can teach is twofold:
 - a. First, *to instruct the church*. There is an ever-present need to instruct new Christians, older Christians whose knowledge is deficient, people who have faith-related questions, younger people who are just learning the faith, those struggling with doubt, etc.
 - b. Second, *to refute teaching that is not according to Scripture* (See Acts 20:28-30, Romans 16:17, etc.). There is never a shortage of people who either misunderstand the Bible and teach error, or who have a distorted and divisive view they insist on sharing (Titus 3:10-11). Shepherds must be prepared to “rebuke” them by exposing the falsehood of their views and by teaching that which is true.

- E. Does “able to teach” require that a shepherd be able to teach *publicly*?
 1. Teaching can occur in all kinds of settings. See Acts 18:24-26, where Priscilla and Aquila, realizing the deficiency in Apollos’ knowledge, “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”
 2. Even among shepherds, some may be gifted with the ability to teach publicly, while others are not (see 1 Peter 4:10-11). At the same time, some may have the gift of teaching more effectively personally than those who can teach publicly. There is always a need for both.
 3. While it is not imperative that a shepherd be a *public* teacher, he must be able to teach in some setting, and not only “able,” but actively doing so. It does no good to have the ability if it is not used, and having the ability is demonstrated by doing it.

4. It is probably healthy to have a mix among the shepherds of both those who can and do teach publicly and those who can and do teach privately.
 5. According to Ephesians 4:11-16, leaders who can guide the church to stability and growth are some of God's "gifts" to His people.
 - a. Verse 11 speaks of "shepherds and teachers." The Greek construction here indicates that these are not two separate roles, but one – the "shepherd-teachers," as suggested by the ESV footnote.
 - b. This indicates that teaching is an inherent part of the shepherding role.
 - c. Verse 12 says part of their function is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (or "service"). Equipping others requires the knowledge and ability to be a servant, as well as to help others become servants.
 - d. The corollary to this is, if the people are not taught, they will not become equipped to serve, the body will not be built up, and we will remain spiritual "children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." We cannot afford an untaught church!
 - e. Romans 12:7 says that teaching is a "gift." I.e., not everyone will be equipped to do it. Those who are "gifted" will do it very well; others may be able to teach, although it may not be their forte.
 - f. How do we know if someone has the gift of teaching (or is capable of teaching) or not? First and foremost, is he doing it now?
 6. *The requirement of teaching is another reason why shepherds must not become burdened with decisions and concerns that can be handled by others.* They must have time for personal study, preparation of lessons for the church, and, in the case of teaching privately, time to spend with those needing their instruction in one-on-one situations.
- F. How can shepherds gain the knowledge they need in order to teach God's people?
1. Part of this need is met by the fact that they are "elders," mature/older Christians whose experience has afforded them the opportunity to learn much over many years, in the same ways that all Christians learn: personal study, Bible study groups/classes, sermons, etc.
 2. Those who desire a deeper or more extensive knowledge can seek it through workshops designed specifically for shepherds, online classes from Christian schools, personal reading and study, etc. Shepherds of the church must be lifelong learners of God's Word and should invest the necessary time required to gain the knowledge they need.
 3. Shepherds can also learn much from one another.
 - a. It is a good practice for them to have regular periods of study together, when they examine their work as shepherds, the needs and problems confronting the church, situations that have arisen in their duties as shepherds, etc., in light of scripture. "What does the Bible have to say about the work we are doing, the challenges we are facing, etc.?"

- b. Such discussions can go a long way toward deepening a shepherd's knowledge of the Word. The "equippers" can equip one another.
 - c. Approaching their work from the standpoint of biblical teaching will also encourage wise actions and save them from destructive mistakes.
4. Remember Joshua 1:8 "For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Conclusion:

- A. The role of a shepherd requires them to be "able to teach." However, this ability does not always mean they must be able to teach publicly. Teaching can occur in many different settings.
- B. Knowing the Word of God is foundational for the ability to teach. Without knowing God's Word, how can a shepherd equip the saints for the work of ministry and refute those who contradict its teachings.
- C. Churches today must put in place ongoing training to equip those with the gift of teaching in how to further their ability, preparing them for the future of leadership within the church.