

2. Seek out and submit to a worthy pastor-teaching ministry.

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “**How can I,**” he said, “**unless someone explains it to me?**” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:
“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Acts 8:30-35 (NIV)

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20 (NIV) (compare John 17:20)

As we see in the eunuch’s example above, having the Bible to read is not any reason to believe that we can understand it without a teacher. Some people have thought that this teacher must be the Holy Spirit because of John 14:26 and 1 John 2:27 and that thought is correct, but it is very often misapplied. As we can see from Matthew 28:20 above, the Lord Jesus commissioned His Disciples to teach others. This applies both to the first teaching of the Gospel (Romans 10:14-15) and to the more advanced teaching of the rest of the Bible. But no teaching can be done without the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the **work of one and the same Spirit**, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit is truly the Teacher, but that does not mean that He does not use human teachers to accomplish His work.

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

As both this passage in Ephesians above and the previous passage in 1 Corinthians 12 teach, it is the Lord Himself Who gives us our spiritual gifts, and as we see in 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:12, these gifts are given to us so that we can help each other to grow spiritually and become able to help others in our own turn. So, even though it is the Lord Himself Who teaches us the Truth, He does so through the instrumentality of the human teachers that He equips with the spiritual gift of pastor-teaching, whom He has also trained in the Truth through other pastor-teachers, whom He has tested as to their trustworthiness in pastor-teaching, and whom He has otherwise prepared for the job. Therefore, it is not wise to understand the passages in John 14 and 1 John 2 as meaning that we do not need human teachers since we too have the Holy Spirit living in us. No, they do not mean that.

The passage in John 14 means that the Holy Spirit would provide direct teaching of the Truth to the apostles at the time to enable them to write the New Testament and that He will help us later to learn all the truth through our own free will choice to read the Bible and take advantage of the gifts of pastor-teachers. The passage in 1 John 2 means that we who believe do not need anyone to teach us anything new about the Gospel. To be saved, all we need is to believe that Jesus Christ was God and became Man too and died for our sins. When we believe this, we receive the Holy Spirit as a token of our acceptance with God. Therefore, we are in no further need for anyone to tell us anything about the Gospel, especially anything false like that Jesus was not truly Human like we are, which is the lie that the believers to whom John was writing were being harassed with. So, neither of these passages is any reason to think that we do not need pastor-teachers to teach us the Truth.

The Bible teaches us that the Bride of Christ is responsible to prepare herself or adorn herself for her husband. This is a very important principle to keep in mind.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has *made herself* ready.

Revelation 19:7 (NIV)

¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴
Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should
wash one another’s feet.
John 13:13-14 (NIV)

That is to say that the Lord not only expects us to, but actually commands us to work together with each other to grow up spiritually and even bring others to join us in the Truth too. This is the glorious task that we have all been given collectively. Note how Paul says this in the passage in Ephesians 4 -

¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the **work of ministry**, for the **edifying** (that is, the building up or the preparation) **of the body of Christ**, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:11-16 (NKJV)

Each body part (compare 1 Corinthians 12:12) is responsible to make its unique contribution empowered by the Spirit (compare 1 Corinthians 12:7) toward the growth of the whole body. We work together using our unique spiritual gifts to build each other up to spiritual maturity. This is what the Bible calls our *good works* (Ephesians 2:10), our *righteous acts* (Revelation 19:8), our *work of ministry* (Ephesians 4:12 above), or even our “*share*” (Ephesians 4:16). Pastor-teachers are a part of the Body of Christ and they have a responsibility to use their gifts and spiritual training to open the Scriptures to their brothers and sisters. They have a mandate from the Lord Jesus as every other believer does to wash the feet of their brothers and sisters, that is, to serve them in the Truth with their pastor-teaching gifts, as the Lord commands us to do in John 13. Just as they have this mandate, only those who let them wash their feet can partake of their gifts just as the Lord taught Peter when he was unwilling to have the Lord wash his feet.

If anyone then will grow up spiritually, just as they had to accept the Gospel at the lips of some evangelist, they must also receive the whole system of truth in the Bible from a gifted and prepared Bible teacher. This is the whole point of Ephesians 4:11-12. First, the Lord gave apostles, and then He gave prophets, two gifts through whom He provided the new revelation that eventually became the New Testament. Third, He gave pastor-teachers who interpret the revelation in the Bible for their brothers and sisters. Other gifts exist in the Church. The evangelist is responsible to use the now-revealed reality of

the Cross to teach the Gospel to willing unbelievers so that those of them who believe will be added to the Church. Very many other gifts exist to support these ones that deal primarily with dispensing the Truth in one way or another. As we accept and use the services of each of these gifts, we all grow spiritually and the Church is built up and prepared for her Lord. To learn the Truth by which we grow spiritually, to understand the Scriptures that we read everyday, we must accept the ministrations of some gifted and prepared pastor-teacher. There is no other way.

The pastor-teacher is tasked by the Lord with interpreting the whole system of truth in the Bible to fellow believers, that is, to take the raw form of the truth in the Bible and make it accessible to fellow believers. It certainly is like making food (consider John 21:15-17 where our Lord commands Peter to feed His sheep and compare that with 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-14). Food is not often easily accessible to us without the skills of a cook. We may derive nourishment from many fruits and other foods without having to go to the trouble of cooking, but while those may give us a start at satisfying our hunger, proper nourishment is going to require significant cooking skills. This is true spiritually too. We can access a few things in the Bible without the help of a teacher. For example, anyone who reads the Bible with an open mind will soon see what the Gospel is, but there is not much beyond the Gospel that is perspicuous to the untaught reader, and as one gets deeper and deeper into the Truth, it becomes clear that unless one has the gift of pastor-teaching, some things will simply remain completely hidden to one until a pastor-teacher comes along.

This may seem like it gives too much power to fickle human beings, but it is actually a test of our own hearts, just as pretty much everything about this life is really a test of our hearts. The real question that we are being asked with this is: ***are we going to submit ourselves to the Lord's way of doing things or are we going to insist on having things our own way?*** From the pastor-teacher's point of view, this is not just a tremendous responsibility, it is also a very daunting task, one, nonetheless, that he ought to undertake enthusiastically and without any pursuit of pay for (1 Peter 5:1-2). He is not allowed by the Lord either to boast in his ability to do this too (Luke 17:7-10). That is to say that this is hard work that is not attractive to do in the earthly sense for pastor-teachers. It is only because one has grown spiritually that one may find it to be a joyful labor of love just as Jacob's fourteen-year toil for Rachel was a joyful one for him because he loved her. This is why the Holy Spirit says through Paul:

⁷ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.
Hebrews 13:7 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.
1 Timothy 5:17 (NKJV)

Those who are given pastor-teaching gifts are the Lord's undershepherds. They are tasked with feeding the Lord's sheep with the spiritual food by which they can grow to spiritual maturity so that they can do their own part in the Body of Christ to help it grow and prepare for the Lord. If we are to grow then, if we are to become spiritually able to do our part in the Body of Christ, we cannot ignore or discount the importance of pastor-teachers. We must submit to their authority and learn from them what the Scriptures that we read mean.

At this point, a very reasonable question does arise: ***how can we tell if someone is a reliable pastor-teacher?*** After all, we know that there are many false teachers (2 Peter 2:10).

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them.
Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)

³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
Matthew 12:33-37 (NKJV)

In the first passage immediately above, the Lord Jesus warns His disciples that there would be many claiming to have the right to speak God's very oracles (that is what it means to be a prophet) whose claim would be false. How can human beings who cannot go to Heaven to see God and verify from Him directly the things that are said in His name know when they are being deceived? If the Truth, God's Truth, is the whole point of our existence here on earth, we must have a way of knowing when we are being lied to about what God actually says. If we don't, we will be adrift in this world of lies, constantly getting sucked into vortex after vortex of delusions. The Lord Jesus tells us what that way is. We are to test their words to see if they are good fruit or bad fruit.

When anyone reads this passage in Matthew 7 and recalls Galatians 5:19-22, they will find it easy to equate the fruit in the former to the fruit in the latter. This is not a wrong way of understanding Matthew 7, but it is not a complete way, and it can also be a bit misleading too. Certainly, the conduct of those who claim to speak God's oracles must be above board or else they will mislead others about His perfect character and thus bring His Perfect Name into disrepute (1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9), but we have to be careful here. The Pharisees were false teachers (Matthew 23:15), but they had an outward righteousness that impressed the people that they taught. Even the Lord Jesus mentioned their meticulous tithing (Matthew 23:23) and their apparent pious reverence for the martyred prophets of the past (Matthew 23:29-30) as some of their outward righteousness, but He condemned all this as a mere show that did not speak true of their own heart toward God (Matthew 23:27-28). So, if we judge merely by outward behavior, we are likely to fall prey to false teachers and prophets. We are warned, after all, that Satan masquerades as an angel of light and therefore his ministers masquerade as ministers of righteousness as well (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

On the other hand, even very mature believers still stumble (James 3:2; 1 John 1:8; see the examples of Moses, David, and Elijah in Numbers 20:7-12; 2 Samuel 11; and 1 Kings 19:1-3 respectively, for example). If we judge pastor-teachers on the basis of their failures then, we would be unable to benefit spiritually from them. To be clear, they have a responsibility to the Lord to not fail, so they ought not to, and it would be wise to avoid a pastor-teacher who carries on with gross sinning as though he had no fear of the Lord (compare 2 Peter 2:13-14). Even if they were true believers with pastor-teaching gifts, their behavior can lead us into sin as well (note Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:6 where he was speaking of the bold sinning of a non-pastor-teacher brother in the church: if it was such a problem in that case, it is so much more the case when it is a pastor-teacher). Still, even pastor-teachers can stumble sometimes. This is not proof that they are false teachers. It is only proof that they are still in mortal flesh.

Therefore, what the Lord Jesus was speaking of with regard to fruit was much more than the discernible behavior of those who claim to be teachers. As we see in the next passage in Matthew 12 above, it is clear that the Lord was speaking especially of the actual words or teachings of those who present themselves as teachers. It is their words that are the fruit that we are to test to see if it is good or bad. A false teacher cannot teach Truth because they don't have truth. A true pastor-teacher will teach Truth because they have been taught Truth too (Matthew 10:27; 1 Timothy 4:6,11; 2 Timothy 2:2).

²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good.
1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NKJV)

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
1 John 4:1 (NKJV)

How do we carry out this test? In our last discussion, we learned of our responsibility to read the Bible and that it is in doing so, that we gain the means to protect ourselves against Satan's lies. It is true that we will not understand very much indeed of what we read in the Bible without the help of a pastor-teacher, but the Bible does give us knowledge of what fits within its limits and what doesn't. When a false teacher tries to mislead a believer who is diligent in reading their Bible and who believes what they actually read, the believer will always find that the Bible calls much that they hear from them into question. So, we are responsible to search the Scriptures to see if the things we are told by those who claim to be teachers are actually in the Bible.

¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and ***searched the Scriptures daily*** to find out whether these things were so.
Acts 17:11 (NKJV)

If we find that what we hear does not violate any part of the Scriptures and that, in fact, it neatly brings different bits of the Bible together to present a whole picture, then we are hearing the Truth. Otherwise, either the teacher is mistaken (as even the greatest pastor-teachers can be on any point of teaching) or else they are a false teacher.

Finally, when we do find a pastor-teaching ministry that is worthy, we ought to settle down and drink freely and deeply of the fountain of Truth that they offer to us. There is no benefit and there is quite a bit of danger in hopping from teacher to teacher.

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will ***heap up for themselves teachers***
2 Timothy 4:3 (NKJV)

¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have ***many fathers***; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you, ***imitate me***. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of ***my ways*** in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.
1 Corinthians 4:15-17 (NKJV)

Worthy pastor-teachers are naturally rare and hard to find (1 Corinthians 12:24 in Greek). This is because of the exceptionally hard road of preparation that they have to take to come into full ministry in the Body of Christ. But we may be blessed such that we find more than one pastor-teacher, just as the Corinthians did with Paul, Peter, and Apollos. This is not a curse. Each teacher can be a genuine and blessed encouragement to our faith in some unique way. But we end up in a very dangerous place spiritually when we begin to take in teaching from multiple sources. What happens at that time is that when there appears to be disagreement between the sources (as there will inevitably be, since we are all flesh and blood), we will choose only what we want to believe at that point. Teachers are given in the Church as rulers, commanders, and officers in the Church still on earth (1

Timothy 3:5; 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Submission to their authority is the only way to get anywhere spiritually (Hebrews 13:7,17). When we are refereeing between multiple teaching authorities, even excellent ones like Paul, Apollos, and Peter, we will find that we are submitting to none and therefore making no spiritual progress at all.

²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.

Matthew 10:24-25 (NKJV)

Ultimately, every true pastor-teacher will bring us to spiritual maturity and help us continue to progress in it, if we stick with them, but unless we are pastor-teachers in our own right, we are not likely to ever get far beyond them in our attainment. This is how the Lord has ordained it. It puts a terrible weight of responsibility on teachers to make sure that they are teaching the Truth that is in the Bible rather than just whatever they or their hearers please. That is not the only thing; even those who wish to grow spiritually thus come under a great weight of responsibility to choose their teachers wisely, if they have so many options (as is rarely ever the case). When we find a worthy teacher, we are to be careful to walk closely with them and learn all that they have to teach us, so that a unified system of truth can be formed in our heart. If we fail to do so, it will cost us terribly spiritually. We will find that we have an unstable structure of truth and be forced to fight our spiritual warfare constantly unsure of ourselves and our tools of warfare.

We have the Scriptures to guide us as we learn from our teachers, and we have been commanded to test everything. That means that when something does not appear to be straight in a teaching, we ought to make bold and ask to have it explained to us by our teacher. If there is an error in the teaching, it will thus be brought to the teacher's attention, so that he can correct it and guide us more correctly. If there isn't, it will help us to appreciate in a more comprehensive and deeper way the things that we read in the Bible for ourselves. So, there is no need to fear getting caught in an echo chamber of errors when we find a worthy teacher. It is the Lord Who prepares and deploys the pastor-teachers who serve us (Ephesians 4:11), and it is He Who brings each of us to the pastor-teacher that He has prepared to feed us and tend us and protect us (Psalm 68:6).

It bears repeating at this point to say that it is not always the case that we will find a pastor-teacher once we begin to search. In some cases, some of us search for a long time before we find a teacher (compare Luke 2:25,38). This may be in order to test our hearts and prove to us whether the Truth is that important or not, so it is important to be patient as we search and wait on the Lord (Isaiah 30:18). When we have been brought to one, however, we would do well to commit ourselves fully to growing spiritually under his wings.