

Taught by God

Sunday August 15, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

John 6:44-45 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, "and they shall all be taught by God."

Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

- Introduction

It is a wonderful complement to all educators that God is a teacher. Teachers face the difficult assignment of giving students the opportunity to learn, helping them to learn content that they desperately need to learn, even when they don't see the significance. I recently read an article by Mark Buchanan in Bloomberg.com making the case that productivity is decreasing because more and more employees realize that their jobs have no real value. This is particularly true in human resources, public relations, lobbying, telemarketing, finance, banking, consulting, management and corporate law. It is not true in garbage collection, firefighting, cleaning, and teaching. People in those fields had their own frustrations, but at least they knew that the service they performed was valuable. So as we take a look at these words of the Lord Jesus, we note first of all, that God is a teacher.

- Set the stage

Jesus, still speaking in that conversation that caused so much consternation in John 6, tells people that the fact that they are drawn to the Lord at all is evidence of the presence and work of God. Those who come to Him, (then and now) come because the Father has drawn them, and that His good and salvific influence fulfills the words of the prophets that the people of God will all be taught by God.

- Still small voice

When I read this, I thought of the passage in 1 Kings 19 (verses 11-12) in which the great prophet Elijah faced a deadly encounter with the prophets of Baal, an encounter in which 400 of the prophets of Baal died. When the evil queen Jezebel heard this, she vowed to kill Elijah so he ran for his life out into the desert. There he met with an angel and then faced an earthquake, and then a whirlwind, but God was not in either of them. God was in the still, small voice who instructed the prophet regarding what he was to do next.

- "taught by God"

That was then, and with a great prophet. Does God speak and teach us ordinary people in this modern age? When Jesus quoted the prophets and said that "they shall all be taught by God", He implied that God can speak, teach and influence us. We may not even be conscious that it is happening at that time. Jesus mentioned that people were drawn to Him as evidence of such influence. It seems to be the case. When our Lord quoted the prophets here, He was quoting from Jeremiah 31:34, which says,

"No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (this is also in Isaiah 54:13 and elsewhere)

- New Testament examples that God teaches His church

There are other passages in the New Testament that assure Christians that God is, and will lead them, and gives specific examples. Philippians tells us that the attitude that we should move forward in our spiritual life, that there is more and we should pursue it; that the goal is the upward call to heaven from God, as evidence that God is teaching you.

Philippians 3:13-16 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

The Apostle Paul wrote that this was his attitude, and that he was confident that God would teach the same to the Christians of Philippi. If you feel that sense that you haven't arrived and that God has more for you, that is not only true, but it is evidence that God has taught us. We did not make that up.

Another example of lessons taught by God to the church is the need for unconditional love, and of productive work. This from the earliest of New Testament epistles:

1 Thessalonians 4:9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

I interpret "work with your own hands" as doing work that has value and, though it is in the words of St. Paul, I include this advice about work as an example of a lesson from God. In that same Bloomberg article I mentioned earlier, the writer wrote of an episode in which several new accountants were trained by the large accounting firm that had hired them to help a large insurance company process claims. Later those same accountants found out that they had been poorly trained deliberately in order to extend the contract and get more money from the insurance company. The work made money for the company, but did it have value? Was it performing a service that made life easier for people? No, and more and more company employees are becoming disillusioned. God teaches us to watch out for those jobs and others like them, that are not productive or helpful. We are to "work with our hands" and do productive work.

- Application

For our application we can ponder if we have ever been led by God. I think all of us have asked that question. In light of these Scriptures, maybe it is a better question to ask, "am I sure that I am not being led by God?" Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that the person following the Lord has his steps ordered by God. We know by example that if we desire to love each other unconditionally and live orderly and productively, that those are lessons taught by God.

- Conclusion

Jesus looked at the people and told them that the words of the prophets were being fulfilled. God was teaching people and drawing them to Jesus. We find that God continues to do so in the church and that people are being taught by God after they have come to Jesus; the Bible even gives

examples of lessons that serve as evidence that God teaches his people and leads them, even if they don't always feel like their being led. God the Father draws them and teaches them. God the Holy Spirit continues the process throughout our lives.