

WHY THE PASTORATE IS FOUNDATIONAL IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE

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The basic instrument of God on earth for witnessing and general service is the local church. This is His headquarters. Therefore, we must conclude that the key position for all Christian service on earth is the pastorate. There is a great need today to re-emphasize the place the local church and pastor occupy in God's total plan of redemption.

Without the leadership of the pastor the work of the local church would suffer and no doubt ultimately die. Without the local church each other facet of Christian service ultimately would be impossible. For instance, the task of church extension could not be carried on. Where would we get the leadership, the men, and the money to establish new churches except from older, local churches? Foreign missions would be impossible for the same reason. Where would we secure the missionaries and the finances to support them in the fields of the world? There would certainly be no seminaries and Christian colleges if it were not for faithful pastors and local churches all over the world who support these necessary projects. This could be said of each facet of denominational work. Souls cannot be saved without soul-winners. Soul-winners are produced through teaching and training by pastors. This all demands the logic of Romans 10:14: "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

Yet, in spite of the clear and primary importance of the pastorate, there is a great need in all denominational circles for pastors. The question is heard on every side, "Where can we get preachers?" At the same time, all too frequently those who go into the pastorate stay for only a short time. They become weary in well doing or some problem arises for which they have not sufficient fortitude. They resign and go into some other aspect of Christian service or back to a secular job. Fatalities in the pastorate are constantly increasing. (Some are led out of the pastorate by the Holy Spirit. We understand this. It is not of these that we speak.) We need to take a hard look at this situation.

This is the reason for our subject. In order to be fully impressed with the revelation of the Word of God in this matter, we should read Ephesians 4:7-16. Here Paul epitomizes the work of the pastor and the church. Certainly we have the very strongest Scriptural basis for our contention.

The pastorate is foundational in Christian service because of:

1. THE TEACHING MINISTRY. "Pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11).

1. This I believe to be the basic task of the pastor (Matt. 28:19, I Tim. 4:11, 6:2, II Tim. 2:2). Scores of times the words "teach" or "teaching" or their equivalent are used of Christ and His ministry. The pastor is to be first a teacher. All other aspects of his ministry are important. Actually, they supplement each other. But at the beginning of all proper Christian service is a knowledge and practice of the Bible. The pastor is schooled in the Word of God and he is God's appointed and logical man to teach it. This means constant study by the pastor himself.

2. The pastor's teaching and ministry should be systematic. It should be adapted to the needs of his people as the Holy Spirit leads. He should be operating his church as a Bible school or a modified seminary, systematically presenting the truths and doctrines of the Word of God and even exposition of various books in a logical manner. This ministry will build up his people in the faith and strengthen them to meet the attacks of Satan. If the pastor only realized it, here lies the basic secret to his success. The infinite resources of truth make inexhaustible material available for this purpose.

3. For the members of any church, growth in grace in the largest sense is only possible through the pastor's teaching ministry. Peter makes it clear that all Christians are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18). Growing in the knowledge of Christ is the secret to all Christian victory. If believers do not grow in grace, they become stagnant and un-ruled. Most of the problems of the average church would be solved immediately by growth in grace in its members. One of the great joys of the pastorate is seeing babes in Christ growing.

4. Some refuse to grow. They are in a class with those to whom Paul alludes in Hebrews 5:11-14. Each church will inevitably have some of these. They have neither the desire nor energy necessary for growth. Such people need special attention by a wide-awake pastor. Even in the early church there were some who knew the Word of God and yet who did not practice it, for instance, Ananias and Sapphira, who refused to obey the Word and lost their lives in the process. Unless the members of a church grow, ultimately they will become a problem. We may expect this.

Do not human philosophies follow this same basic rule? Teach your philosophy, indoctrinate, establish certain truths as basic, vital, indispensable, and you are ready to foster and develop your movement. Communism follows this formula exactly. It is the same with our Christian philosophy. The whole movement of the church in any particular era may be easily controlled by the teaching of local pastors.

Thus, the teaching ministry of a pastor lies at the foundation of all that God does on earth in redeeming men. It is supremely important. In fact, it is the earthly fountain from which all blessings flow into other channels of Christian endeavor.

II. THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY. "Do the work of an evangelist" (II Tim. 4:5).

This is the clear command of Paul to Timothy and to each pastor. In fact, it is one of the highest qualifications for a pastor. Actually, according to the record of the Bible, Timothy was not a particularly noted mass evangelist, but he did do the work of an evangelist. Be a "gospel-izer." The "go" of Matthew 28:19 is here. The pastor must reach out beyond the confines of his own church and congregation in this evangelistic ministry.

This does not primarily mean that he should be holding a certain number of evangelistic meetings in his own church annually, although this may be good. Actually, the least important and significant aspect of the meaning of the word evangelism is found in mass evangelism. This type of evangelistic work really is a by-product of personal, basic, New Testament evangelism.

1. The pastor should lead in soul-winning activity. He should be the leading soul-winner in his church. Christ was the leading soul-winner in His day. He won Nicodemus. He won the Samaritan woman. He won Andrew and many others. Out of all walks of life and all ages, Christ

won the people to Himself. We can understand why the writer of Proverbs in chapter 11 and verse 30 said: "He that winneth souls is wise." The people in the local church will not do what the pastor is unwilling to do. In a new church he usually wins most of the converts. This is natural because he has the training and knows how to use the Sword of the Spirit. When a pastor is too busy to win souls, he breaks his fellowship with the Lord and usually shortens his tenure, both in a local church and the ministry as a whole. He sacrifices the special blessing that God has for those who faithfully witness and thus bring souls to Christ. Most successful pastors in America today qualify as personal soul-winners themselves.

2. The pastor should train his people in personal visitation evangelism. He should be holding classes constantly for training older and newer recruits in witnessing. The whole visitation program should be in the pastor's hands and completely directed by him. In 11 Timothy 2:2 Paul says to Timothy: "Commit these things to faithful men that they may teach others also." In Acts 20:4 we find that Paul trained Aristarchus and Secundus, and these men evangelized Greece. This is the New Testament way of building churches, not mass evangelism. I have actually heard pastors say, "I do not like to visit," and at the same time these men wonder why their churches do not grow.

3. The pastor should lead others into Christian service. This is his larger propagating ministry. Each pastor should be obeying Matthew 9:38, praying the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust forth laborers into His harvest. The pastor will lead his people in prayer that God will thrust his divinely chosen servants into the harvesting area. It is ours to pray and God's task to thrust. Doing it any other way gets us into trouble.

Here is where we get home and foreign missionaries, pastors for the pastorate, and find the privilege also of supporting them financially. This is the wider evangelistic ministry of the pastor and his church. In this sense, also, the pastor is the hub of God's wheel of testimony.

Actually, all church-related and independent organizations must come to the local church for manpower and financial support. Such splendid organizations as Youth for Christ, the Rural Bible Crusade, the Child Evangelism Fellowship, etc., must depend upon the pastor and the local church for their support in every way.

Do you see the extremely crucial nature of the pastor's work here? The church cannot grow without it. God depends upon his undershepherd. He is the key man.

III. THE PASTORAL MINISTRY. "Pastors" (Eph. 4:11).

Dr. Torrey once said, "To be a pastor is the greatest honor bestowed on mortal man."

1. The word "pastor" comes from the root word meaning "to protect." Actually, the word "pastor" has come to be used in the connotation of the shepherd of God's flock on earth. In 1 Peter 5:2 the apostle says: "Feed the flock of God which is among you." This meaning has projected itself to designate the pastor as the leader of the local church.

This aspect of the pastor's work is extremely comprehensive. In it is involved all of the church's administration -- every aspect of his leadership in this respect. It may include anything from a strictly spiritual ministry to helping a member of the church fix a frozen and broken water

pipe. The pastor must be the trouble-shooter in the church, and must also have the solution for the trouble when he finds it.

2. In this role the pastor is much like the Old Testament priest or like our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:15). He participates as fully as possible in the emotions and problems of his people. When they sorrow, he sorrows. When they rejoice, he rejoices. In all of this he is the tender, loving, sweet-spirited man of God whose own heart has been seasoned by the love of Christ. The most touching instance and illustration of this type of work in connection with our blessed Lord is in His dealing with Peter up to, through, and following the crucifixion. It is in this same spirit that the pastor must deal with his members.

3. Without this pastoral ministry no church can possibly succeed. Believers in the church will fall by the wayside one after the other. Insurmountable problems will arise to plague the church in everything that it does. This lack of pastoral work will provide the Devil's seed plot. Here again we are faced with the absolutely crucial nature of the pastor's responsibility in relation to the whole work of God through the local church.

IV. THE DISCIPLINARY MINISTRY. (Matt. 18:15-18).

1. The pastor must lead the church in judging sin and unrighteousness wherever they are found (I Cor. 5:4,5). Discipline is primarily and basically the task of the local church. However, the church ordinarily will not exercise this ministry until the pastor leads. So often members of a church, where there is some problem, will ask, "Why doesn't the pastor do something about this?" Actually, it is the task of the local church to do something about it, but they will follow only the leadership of the pastor. This leadership is a vital part of his work. He should not shun it nor try to avoid it as so many have, thus causing himself and the church to suffer irreparable damage. I am ready to say that this is fully as important as praying.

2. The local church cannot have the full blessing of God unless it exercises discipline upon its members (I Cor. 5:11-13). Anything else is disobedience to the Word of God. This grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30-32). He cannot bless. The church stagnates. The problems grow worse. The matter then focuses on the pastor. At the next business meeting he is voted out and his heart is broken. Often this is his own fault for not having dealt with the situation as he should. As many churches are wrecked by lack of discipline as for any other reason.

3. Actually, the majority of our church problems are personal problems between members which grow in importance and effect through a period of time. The pastor must be busy in private counseling constantly, caring for these matters, and should not allow the problems to develop. Careful handling of small matters avoids bigger trouble. And as he deals with his people, it should be done in a spirit of kindness, gentleness, and meekness, according to the Word of God (II Thess. 3:15, Gal. 6:1). Neither should the pastor go to seed on the matter of discipline, and act like a tyrant -- criticizing and scolding his people publicly and with abandon. However, his responsibility in discipline is just as certain as his responsibility in any of the other aspects of his ministry.

If a pastor does not properly lead in disciplinary action in the church, the church's ministry will ultimately come to naught. The damaging divisions which so often take place in churches come, on the average, from this lack. Therefore, the whole work of God suffers. The pastor is responsible for this.

CONCLUSION

1. It is clear that in these four areas, which comprise the whole of the Christian ministry, God depends fully and basically on his great corps of undershepherds to lead His church in this world, and at the same time to provide for the needs of a spiritually sick world of men. This is a big job. Only God can do it through His ministers.

Is it not to be expected that because of the all-important and crucial nature of the pastor's work the biggest guns of Satan will be trained on him? Remember that an ancient king who fought against Israel once said, "Fight neither with small or great, save only with the King of Israel!" (II Kings 22:31). Satan concentrates his attacks on God's ministers. He says, "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the pastors of the churches." Well, what of it? If God be for us, who can be against us?

2. Yet, despite the importance of the calling and God's guarantees, many shy away from the pastorate and its potentialities. Some become pastors and remain so for a short time until the rigors of the task overwhelm them. "Well," they say, "there are too many problems." What Christian service does not have its problems? "The salaries are too low." Such a man made a mistake at the beginning when he entered the ministry. "People do not respond to my ministry." How did they respond to Christ's ministry? "My personality is not right." If God called you, He gave you the right personality. The trouble is, you do not control it. "My wife has a physical problem." Well, is she yielded to the Lord in the pastorate?

3. You must first know the will of the Lord for your service in His vineyard. But if you are looking for a key, all-important position in God's service, you will find it as a pastor of a local church. Do you want a real challenge? Here it is. At the grass roots of the whole plan of God on earth is the work of the local church pastor.

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