

SHEPHERDS, LEAD!

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The hidden agendas for pastoral duties found in many churches are a result of a misunderstanding of the pastoral function in the local church. The pastor may function as an elder and/or a bishop, but his primary responsibilities in the local church are to provide leadership and to teach (as did Timothy and Titus). God especially equips the pastor to fulfill these duties. If the hidden agendas are renounced in favor of the NT directives, the twentieth century church will receive the benefit.

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INTRODUCTION

IN my second year as a pastor, I became aware of a hidden agenda used in the examination and selection of pastors. The Senior Pastor and I had resigned, both of us intending to assume home mission responsibilities. A pulpit committee, composed of the foremost men in the church, was elected to search for and recommend a pastoral candidate to the congregation. It was a scene common among self-governing churches in America. For its initial meeting, the committee chose to meet in the large Christian Education office where my desk was located. Surprised by the committee's entrance, I rose to my feet and proceeded to gather the project on which I was working. Although the men quickly assured me that my presence did not concern them, remaining in the room did not seem proper to me. Before I could gather my things and depart, however, the men sat down and the meeting began. A prominent name was mentioned. "Oh, we couldn't ask him," replied another voice. "He would want to do things his own way." Other names were mentioned. One man was too fat. Another was too old. The hidden agenda was out on the table.

Twenty years have passed since my introduction to the hidden agenda. New forms of local church government have been encouraged. Strong, visionary leadership from the pastor has become a desirable trait. But hidden agendas remain.

It is my opinion that such agendas abound because pastors are not sure of their own identities and responsibilities. They try to function

like deacons by visiting the sick and helping the poor. They try to function like bishops by meeting with committees and supervising church programs. They try to function like pastors by preaching and teaching. In their efforts to be everything and do everything, they end up as office managers and program technicians.

I know full well that there are pressures on pastors to be all things to all people. There are occasions when it is impossible to avoid the mixing of roles. However, role confusion over a long period of time results in frustration for both pastor and congregation. Hidden agendas and expectations, if left uncorrected, will diminish the pastoral ministry and thus impoverish the local church. It is important for pastors to clearly identify their roles on the basis of Scripture.

THREE CRUCIAL WORDS

There are three words in the Greek NT that dominate any discussion of the pastoral role: πρεσβύτερος / 'elder', ἐπίσκοπος / 'bishop', and ποιμήν / 'pastor'. The first word seems to describe a person who is characterized by maturity and dignity.¹ The second word refers to a person who is charged with the duty or function of supervision.² The third word refers to a person who leads and cares for sheep.³ All three words may be found in combination with one another. In Acts 20 Paul reminds the elders (v 17) from Ephesus that the Holy Spirit has appointed them as bishops (v 28), and that they are to shepherd (v 28 from the verb ποιμαίνω) the flock of God. In 1 Peter 5, Peter admonishes elders (v 1) to shepherd (v 2) the flock of God, exercising oversight (v 2 from the verb ἐπισκοπέω)⁴ in a spirit of willing sacrifice. The complex working relationship between the duties implied in these three words has occasioned a variety of views on the nature of church leadership.

One segment of Christendom, in an effort to focus attention on the supervisory role of its top leadership, has chosen the word "Episcopalian" to describe its form of church government. Others prefer the term "Presbyterian," choosing to organize and govern their churches through the election of mature men and women. Still others

¹BAGD, 699; Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1958) 121-22.

²BAGD, 299.

³From the idea of "pasturing, feeding," the verb passes readily into the idea of "governing, guiding." See BAGD, 684.

⁴There is some doubt whether ἐπισκοποῦντες / 'exercising oversight' should be read in 1 Pet 5:2. It is supported in p⁷² N^c, A, It., Byz, Lect, et al. It is omitted in N* and B. The wide geographical distribution of ms containing ἐπισκοποῦντες argues strongly that it is the original reading. Titus 1:5, 7 could also be mentioned as another passage where ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος occur in close proximity in reference to the same man or office.

prefer the strong, local leadership of a pastor, and might call themselves "Poimenian." However churches organize themselves and whatever aspect of government they choose to emphasize, the roles and functions embodied in these three words are not to be denied.⁵ But imprecise language, role confusion, and deliberate abridgment of one function or the other can only result in the development of hidden agendas and the eventual weakening of the local church.

It is a common practice among some churches to merge all three roles and functions into one administrative office. Familiarity with that practice encourages imprecise choice of terms and subsequent role confusion. For example, one competent writer, when commenting on the opening verses of I Timothy 3, makes the claim that "A local church has two administrative offices: the pastor and the deacon."⁶ Yet the word used in I Tim 3:1 is ἐπισκοπῆς. Evidently the writer's choice of words was inexact because of familiarity with a particular form of church government—a pastor accompanied by a board of deacons.

The roles of elders and bishops do not necessarily cease to exist in the local church just because they are ignored in favor of the role of the pastor. Often their function is carried on by people with different titles who sometimes do not have the qualifications listed in Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus. The effect of this can be harmful to the whole church.

While it is easy to argue that the terms "elder" and "bishop" generally refer to the same office on the basis of Titus 1:5-7, it is not easy to argue that the term "pastor" refers to the same office as well. That particular gift, office, or function is not even named in the pastoral epistles. However, Timothy and Titus might be called pastors. Their influence and authority were highly visible, and Paul repeatedly commanded them to exercise the pastoral gift of teaching.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul clearly identified those offices that were given by God to build the Church:

And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of, the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ [Eph 4:11-13].⁷

⁵For a thought-provoking exchange between two innovators in church government, see Larry Richards and Gene Getz, "A Biblical Style of Leadership," *Leadership* 2:2 (Spring 1981) 68-78.

⁶R. G. Gromacki, *Stand True To The Charge* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 74.

⁷All scriptural passages quoted in this article are taken from *NASB*.

The permanence of these offices is often debated, some viewing one, two, or even three of the offices as temporary.⁸ But no one denies the present existence of the pastoral gift. The combination of pastor and teacher into one office is argued, but no one denies that the pastor must be a teacher.⁹ The partial listing of gifts in 1 Cor 12:28 lends further support: "And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." The teaching gift is listed without reference to the separate gifts of evangelism and pastoring found in Eph 4:11. This could well represent a combination of three distinct gifts, with the leading component serving as an umbrella. The gifts of evangelism, pastoring and teaching often reside simultaneously in one person.

The pastor is a special kind of teacher. He is a teacher who should stand out among other teachers because of a gift from God. In his clear exposition of the Bible he should emulate the Chief Shepherd, who taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). He will probably be a bishop if he supervises the work of others. If he is in the middle years of life, experienced and mature, he will probably be an elder as well. Whether his forum is a seminary classroom, a conference platform, a mission headquarters, or a church auditorium, his gift is to lead a flock of sheep. Whatever Christians today might call him, he functions as a pastor or shepherd of God's flock. Recognition of this basic truth is a necessary first step in removing the hidden agendas hindering many churches today.

COMMAND AND TEACH

One of the most fascinating verbal exchanges between Jesus and his disciples may be found in John 21:15-17. It is the story of Peter's recovery from failure as a disciple, and his return to leadership:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

⁸Gromacki (*Stand True To The Charge*, 74) suggests that the gifts of apostleship, prophecy and evangelism were temporary and have ceased.

⁹For a careful examination of linguistic evidence, see Daniel B. Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Construction in the New Testament," *GJJ* 4 (1983) 59-84.

Many people are aware of the subtle shift in the Lord's use of the words for "love." But very few realize that Jesus also used two different words in his command that Peter "shepherd" and "tend" the Master's sheep. The Lord first used the word βόσκω, then changed to ποιμαίνω, and finally returned to βόσκω for the third repetition of his command. The combination is significant.

The word βόσκω simply means "to provide food," while the word ποιμαίνω more broadly refers to "the guiding, guarding, folding of the flock, as well as finding of nourishment for it."¹⁰ Peter was to feed the lambs and the sheep of the flock of God. But he also had a wider responsibility to lead the flock in every aspect of its existence. Providing nourishment, though paramount in all the pastor's work, is simply not enough.

Many fine young men have done poorly as pastors of local churches because they were unable to bring a commanding presence to the work. They may have been excellent supervisors, or warm-hearted teachers, or compelling evangelists, but they lacked the authoritative leadership required of a shepherd. Even the addition of experience and maturity cannot fully compensate for the absence of the ability to lead effectively.

The apostolic directives to Timothy and Titus presuppose such a pastoral gift, a gift to which Paul refers in 1 Tim 1:18; 4:14; and 2 Tim 1:6. The written support of an apostle certainly provided instant credibility for these younger teachers in Ephesus and Crete. But the capacity to lead strongly in matters of doctrine and conduct was an absolute necessity, without which the apostolic directives were useless. In his general introduction to 1 Timothy, Gromacki calls attention to this:

The concept of charge is dominant in this epistle. The verb (*paragellō*) is used five times (1:3; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17) and its noun form is found twice (1:5, 18). The term suggests the transfer of commands from a superior officer to a subordinate. Paul expected that Timothy, as a "good soldier of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:3), would carry out the apostolic charge.¹¹

It is instructive to note that in all but one of the above named cases, Paul called upon Timothy to command the Ephesians. Only in 1 Tim 6:13-14 did Paul use παραγγέλλω in direct reference to Timothy:

¹⁰R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (ninth ed.; London: Macmillan, 1880) 85. For a defense of the view that these word shifts involve changes in meaning see William Hendriksen, *John* (New Testament Commentary; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 2. 494-500. For arguments that the word shifts are simply stylistic and convey identical meanings see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 870-77.

¹¹Gromacki, *Stand True To The Charge*, 22.

I charge you [παραγγέλλω] in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment [ἐντολήν] without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all other cases, Timothy was the one expected to give the “charges” and “commands.” When Timothy appeared to falter under the pressures that most certainly come to leaders in command, Paul wrote again to Timothy, reminding him to “kindle afresh the gift of God” which was in him and urging him to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:6; 2:1).

Strong and commanding leadership in matters of doctrine and conduct does not necessitate tyrannical behavior. Adolf Hitler called himself the Leader, but at a point in time he ceased being a genuine leader and became a tyrant. The power to control others is not real leadership. As James MacGregor Burns observes, “A leader and a tyrant are polar opposites.”¹² Perhaps Timothy allowed his gift to smolder, without bright flames, because he feared the possible alienation of his hearers. It is a fear not uncommon to pastors. Paul was careful to delineate between tyrannical behavior and pastoral leadership:

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will [2 Tim 2:24-26].

Gentle correction does not imply weakness or lack of leadership. Neither does kindness legitimize holding back truth. Patience is not timid hesitation. Style, not content, is the subject of Paul's admonition.

Simply put, shepherds feed and lead. They lead in such a way that no individual member of the flock is able to disregard the shepherd. This requires a delicate balance between kindness and patience, on the one hand, and authority on the other. This agenda for pastoral responsibility should be foremost when local churches seek pastors.

CONCLUSION

Field Marshall William Slim, in an address at the United States Military Academy, opened his heart to young cadets on the subject of command:

When things are bad . . . there will come a sudden pause when your men will stop and look at you. No one will speak. They will just look at you

¹²J. M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 3.

and ask for leadership. Their courage is ebbing; you must make it flow back, and it is not easy. You will never have felt more alone in your life.¹³

There is loneliness in command. When things are bad, the leader wishes he could return to being a follower. The shepherd may long for the status of a sheep. But the Chief Shepherd has called him forward, and placed in his hands the tools of a shepherd. The sheep look expectantly for leadership. This study has argued that the sheep must abandon their hidden agendas and adopt a scriptural agenda if true pastoral leadership is their goal.

What are the tools for such leadership? The qualities required of bishops, listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, are qualities which ideally should be developed in all believers. Accuracy of doctrine and purity of conduct are mandated in Scripture for every member of the flock of God. But what are the special tools of a shepherd, which belong to him alone?

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus reveal some answers to that question:

1. The ability to teach accurately and authoritatively even when alone, yet without striving (1 Tim 1:3; 4:6; 5:20-21; 6:17; 2 Tim 2:1-2, 14-15; 4:2-5; Tit 2:1, 15; 3:8).
2. The ability to relate doctrine to practical conduct (1 Tim 1:5; 4:7-8, 12, 15-16; 2 Tim 2:22; Tit 2:7-8).
3. The willingness to select faithful men to oversee the work of God (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9).
4. The willingness to select faithful men and women who can perform works of service (1 Tim 2:8-10; 3:8-13; 5:9-10, 16; 2 Tim 2:1-2).
5. The courage to show oneself, and the discipline to make the show worth seeing (1 Tim 4:12, 15-16; 2 Tim 3:10; Tit 2:7-8).
6. The courage to accept hardship and personal sacrifice in the spirit of the Chief Shepherd (1 Tim 6:11-16; 2 Tim 1:6-9; 2:1-3; 4:2-5).

An unfading crown of glory awaits shepherds who lead. Let us choose them well.

¹³Cited by S. W. Roskill, *The Art of Leadership* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1965) 152.