

The Pastor's Role in the Local Church

Introduction

God gives the pastor of a local church an immense responsibility. The pastor is responsible for the edification, function, and wellbeing of a local congregation. The ultimate goal of a pastor is to glorify God by presenting the members of his congregation before the Lord with joy (Heb. 13:7). This goal is only realized through submission to Jesus Christ as the pastor fulfills each of the roles given to him in the Scriptures. While there are many ways to categorize these responsibilities, Scripture specifies three overarching task groupings the pastor is to fulfill: preacher/teacher, administrator/leader, and shepherd/example. Each of these groups is clearly defined and necessitated in God's Word.

Pastor as Preacher/Teacher

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations" is one of Christ's last commands before ascending into heaven (Mat. 28:19). This command is for all believers but is especially true for the pastor. While not all those appointed to teach are also appointed to preach, every preaching pastor is appointed to teaching. The Apostle Paul explicitly states that Christ gave him both the responsibility of preaching and of teaching (2 Tim. 1:11). Paul exhorts Timothy as a young pastor to preach the Word during convenient and inconvenient times alike (2 Tim. 4:2). God's Word is explicit that the pastor is to be a preacher and teacher.

The Necessity of Biblical Preaching/Teaching

Preaching and teaching are biblical mandates for every pastor. In a sense, they are the foremost responsibilities of the pastor: superseding even the responsibilities of administration and shepherding. The apostles in the early church recognized the preeminence of preaching/teaching God's Word by appointing deacons over other responsibilities (Acts 6:2). God entrusts every pastor with the Gospel (1 Thes. 2:4) and commands him to "[hold] fast the faithful word" through

preaching and teaching (Titus 1:9). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul claims that his goal in preaching was to please God (1 Thes. 2:4). Likewise, preachers today can glorify God through their preaching (1 Pet. 4:11). Surely any endeavor that can glorify God should be done to the best of the pastor's ability. Furthermore, the responsibility of preaching is a serious endeavor as God examines the hearts (1 Thes. 2:4) of those who preach and teach. Because God entrusts the preaching and teaching of His Word to the pastor, the issue of good stewardship is also significant (1 Pet. 4:10). Pastors exercise good stewardship through their faithful preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. The biblical pastor is commissioned to preach and teach God's Word.

The Content of Biblical Preaching/Teaching

Biblical preaching and teaching is comprehensively defined in Scripture. Matthew 9:35 states that Jesus went through Israel "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." Likewise, Paul shares "the kingdom of God" and "those things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" during his first stay in Rome (Acts 28:31). Clearly, the pastor is to share his knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ through preaching and teaching.

The Apostle Paul also wrote several exhortations to Timothy concerning preaching. Paul stresses that a pastor must "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Preaching is sharing the Scriptures with application before a group. This preaching for the modern pastor may be exegetical or topical in nature but is always based on God's Word. Paul also states that the pastor must teach (2 Tim. 4:2). Teaching may be one-on-one or in a group. Sound teaching is essential for both believers and unbelievers alike (Titus 1:9). This teaching may also be of an exegetical or topical nature. Paul also shares that he was called by God to preach faith and truth (1 Tim. 2:7). Today's pastor, like Paul, must carefully strive to preach only the truth and to preach in a way that promotes the Christian faith and glorifies the God of our faith.

The Purpose of Biblical Preaching/Teaching

Christ demonstrates that a primary purpose of biblical preaching is to point the lost to Himself (Luke 24:27). "The harvest is plenteous" Christ states "but the

laborers are few” (Mat. 9:37). God in His wisdom has not allowed the wisdom or philosophies of this World to lead men to Christ: rather, it is through the perceived “foolishness of preaching” that men can be saved (1 Cor. 1:21). One can only believe on the Lord when he hears (most likely from a preacher or teacher) on whom to call (Rom. 10:14). Paul viewed preaching as a significant outreach tool in witnessing to the lost. It is through preaching sound doctrine that Titus is to refute those who would contradict God’s Word (Titus 1:9). Paul also instructs Timothy to teach those who oppose with the hope that God will allow them to repent (2 Tim. 2:25). One of the primary purposes of preaching and teaching is to point others to Christ.

Biblical preaching and teaching are also essential for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11). Jesus commands Peter to “feed my lambs” or to “feed my sheep” a total of three times in three consecutive verses (John 21:15-17). While it is possible that the variations in the words for “feed” and “lambs/sheep” are stylistic, it should be observed that Peter as a preacher/teacher is commanded to tend both young and old sheep. The word used for “feed” in the first and third iterations of the command is a word meaning to “graze” the sheep, whereas the second time a word meaning “tend” (as a shepherd) is used. Christ expects the pastor to adapt his preaching to meet the needs of his congregation. Paul states in Acts 20:28-32 that sound preaching is a means of protection from false doctrine. It is through both “warning” against false doctrine and “teaching” biblical truths that a pastor strives to present a local congregation as “[mature] before Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:27-28). While pastors cannot always protect their flock from exposure to the world, they can teach sound doctrine to protect their flock from the World’s error. God gave the pastor as a preacher and teacher to a local church as one means of equipping believers to serve and building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11). Truly, building up the body of Christ is a primary purpose of preaching and teaching.

The Means of Biblical Preaching/Teaching

There is perhaps no greater contradiction than between the world’s view of preaching and the reality of preaching. While the world views preaching as foolishness, Christians know that biblical preaching is the power of God (1 Cor

1:18). Paul states that his preaching was without worldly wisdom but was rather a demonstration of the Holy Spirit and of God's power (1 Cor. 2:4). For this reason, Paul exhorts those who preach to preach confidently as one through whom God is speaking (1 Pet. 4:11). Pastors can preach confidently with the knowledge that God empowers their biblical preaching.

Sadly, many men throughout the ages have used "preaching" for their own means. Paul and Peter both address the issue of false motives. Paul asserts that his preaching was without error, impurity, or an intent to deceive (1 Thes. 2:3). This list is connected by the idea of intentional falsehood. Whether a preacher is in complete error, tarnishes his truthful message with some fabrication, or intentionally gives partial truths; he is guilty of falsehood. Paul acknowledges the danger of all falsehood and denies any part in it. He also claims that his preaching was not for the flattery of men (1 Thes. 2:5). Both flattery and falsehood are illegitimate means because they are based on a desire to please someone else more than God (1 Thes. 2:4). Finally, both Paul and Peter address the desire for wealth. While Paul refers to "a cloak of covetousness" (1 Thes. 2:5) and Peter refers to "filthy lucre" (1 Pet. 5:2), the point is the same: neither apostle preached out of a desire for personal gain. James 3:1 warns that preachers and teachers will be judged more strictly because they have assumed the responsibility instructors of others. The pastor avoids any appearance of falsehood, flattery, or covetousness in his preaching knowing that he will be carefully scrutinized.

The Scriptures also provide a wealth of positive attributes that pastors should exhibit in preaching or teaching. Acts 28:31 states that Paul's preaching exhibited confidence that would allow no man to hinder him. God ordained Paul to preach in faith and truth (1 Tim. 2:7). Likewise, the pastor preaches and teaches God's truth regardless of who has forbidden him. However, this confidence is not from a lack of care for those who are in error. Paul charges Timothy to patiently teach those opposed to the gospel (2 Tim. 2:25). The pastor's confidence in God's Word must be great enough for him to be patient with those who oppose. Finally, Peter states that pastors preach and teach willingly and eagerly (1 Pet. 5:2). The pastor believes that it is a privilege to preach and teach God's Word.

The Preacher of Biblical Preaching/Teacher

Christ has high expectations for those who preach His gospel. The ability to preach/teach is a gift from God to the pastor (1 Pet. 4:10). The pastor is then in turn given from God to the church (Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10). The pastor is obligated to preach and teach God's word (1 Tim. 4:13). He feels a constraint to preach the gospel and also a willingness to preach (2 Pet. 5:2, 1 Cor. 9:16-17). God desires the pastor to be eager for the work He has given in preaching the Word (2 Tim. 2:15). While most pastors are paid to preach the Word, Paul states that his "work" was not in the hopes of a physical reward (1 Thes. 2:9). There is not a contradiction between the present day model and Paul's example but rather an emphasis of focus. The pastor wants to preach even if he also needs to find work elsewhere. Meanwhile, the church is to pay the worthy pastor a "double honor" of respect and physical recompense (1 Tim. 5:17). The pastor must focus on serving God above all else.

The pastor must not only have the right focus but also have the right credentials: the pastor must be blameless in character (1 Tim. 3:2). He must be pure with regards to sexual sins. He must be self-controlled (defined in 2 Tim. 2:24 as kind and patient). He must also be respectable, hospitable, able to rule his own house, and of mature age in Christ. The strict qualifications of the pastor ensure that he is a man that people can trust when he presents the Scriptures.

The pastor is God's instrument of public instruction to the church body. This public instruction is given at regular intervals, through regular channels, and to a regular and growing body of believers. These "regular" activities require supervision that also falls under the responsibility of the pastor.

Pastor as Administrator/Leader

Paul's exhortation "let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) requires organization in every local body of believers. The function of administration/leadership is one of the reasons that Paul left Timothy in Crete (Titus 1:5-6). Clearly Paul viewed administration/leadership as vital in a local church since he willingly gave up a member and comrade of his missionary endeavors to serve as an administrator/leader. The pastor is responsible for this

administration/leadership in a local church. Not only does the pastor administrate/lead to ensure the smooth functioning of local church operations but he also leads the church body and individual church members in intentional growth toward Christlikeness (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Clearly, the biblical pastor is an administrator/leader.

The Source of Biblical Administration/Leadership

God is ultimately the source of church administration/leadership and therefore defines the pastor's role as administrator/leader. All three members of the Trinity are mentioned with regard to authority in the church. Furthermore, each member of the Trinity gives administration/leadership to pastors in the Church. God has established the position of pastor (teacher) in the local church (1 Cor 12:28). The position of pastor is only preceded by the positions of apostle and prophet, neither of which are currently given by God to the church. Therefore, God has given the pastor the preeminent position of administrator/leader in current church operation. Likewise, the Holy Spirit chooses who will oversee the "church of God" (Acts 20:28). The word used for "overseer" may alternatively be read as "bishop" or "guardian." The Holy Spirit places men in the church to look over and watch after members of a local body. This position of leadership in the church given by the Holy Spirit clearly denotes the biblical role of a pastor. Finally, Jesus Christ is "the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22, **Col. 1:18**). Christ has in turn given to pastors the responsibility of administrating/leading local congregations (Eph. 4:11-12). Each member of the Trinity has distinctly given authority to the pastor of a local congregation.

The Pastor as a Biblical Administrator/Leader

The Scriptures list many qualifications for the man who administrates/leads a local body of believers. First, the administrator/leader is qualified because he is appointed by God (**1 Cor. 12:28**) and the Holy Spirit (**Acts 20:28**) and given to the church by Jesus Christ (**Eph. 4:11-12**). While this appointment by all the members of the Trinity is both real and the most significant qualification of a pastor as administer/leader, it is difficult for the church to empirically verify or confirm this

qualification. Partially for this reason God has given other visible qualifications by which the church can identify God's appointed man. Most notably, the pastor is male (1 Tim. 2:12). While men and women are equal before God and have equal value in the church, their functions differ. Christ has given the responsibility of church leadership to men. Next, the pastor is one whose character is uniformly faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). The church has a right to judge a pastor by his faithfulness but neither the church's judgment nor even the pastor's own self-judgment is the pastor's main concern (**1 Cor. 4:3**). Paul states that the pastor's faithfulness is based on the realization that God will examine the pastor's faithfulness (**1 Cor. 4:4**). The pastor is faithful in his duties to the church. Finally, the pastor is faithful in ruling his own house (1 Tim. 3:4-5, Titus 1:5-6). While this is not the only qualification that Paul writes to Timothy and Titus, it is the key requirement regarding administration/leadership. A man is not worthy of administrating/leading the body of Christ if he cannot first administrate/lead his own family. God has given clear qualifications for the pastor as administrator/leader.

The Necessity of Biblical Administrators/Leaders

The pastor is required by God to be an administrator/leader. God gives the pastor to a church to prepare believers to minister and build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11). In other words, the pastor is not only ordained to work with the congregation but he is also ordained to teach the congregation to work. Humanly speaking, any organizational effort within the church requires an administrator/leader to plan and to see the plan through to completion. The pastor is accountable before God for the success of the individuals in his congregation (Heb 13:17). God designed this accountability to be a joy to the pastor and a blessing to the congregation. However, if the pastor does not well administrate/lead or if the church members do not obey, the intended joy becomes grief and the intended blessing becomes of no advantage.

There are many facets to administrating/leading in a church. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 states several reasons for the pastor to be an administrator/leader. First, The pastor instructs his congregation "how it is necessary to behave" (literal

translation). Proper behavior affects every aspect of church life including relations and functions within the church and relationships and functions with those outside the church. Second, the pastor administrates/leads the church in a way that is appropriate for the house of the living God. Paul wrote this command to Timothy who was ministering in Ephesus. This city was filled with temples that worshiped false gods. Christ expects His church to be administered/lead in a way that is set apart from the world and other false religions. Likewise the modern pastor holds himself to a higher standard of administration/leadership in the church of the living God. Third, the pastor administrates/leads in a way that emphasizes the church is God's pillar and support of truth. The pastor's steadfast belief in Scripture is a moorage by which the congregation can remain focused on real truth in a relativistic world. The church can only be a foundation that enforces truth if the Scriptures are maintained as the source of truth. A fourth facet of administration/leadership is the training of future administrators/leaders. In 2 Tim. 2:2, Paul exhorts Timothy to pass on his entrusted knowledge to other faithful men. Likewise the biblical pastor of today systematically trains young men for full time ministry. Training young men is an intentional task that requires the pastor to be an administrator/leader. Whether the pastor delegates or personally oversees a given area of responsibility in the church, the pastor is responsible before God for how the church is administrated/led. God has ordained the pastor to be an administrator/leader.

The Methods of Biblical Administration/Leadership

Christ has called the pastor to administrate/lead based on specific guidelines. First, the pastor administrates/leads as a servant (Matthew 23:11). This is counterintuitive to the world's philosophy (Mat. 20:25-28). Christ states that the administrators/leaders in the church are the servants of the congregation. Next, Romans 12:8 states that those who rule should do so diligently. If all rulers are to rule diligently then the biblical pastor must administer/lead the church of God in a diligent manner. Third, the pastor administrates/leads in an honest and orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:40). This requires preparation and integrity on the part of the pastor. Next, the pastor takes his responsibilities in the church willingly (1 Pet. 5:2).

Administration/leadership is not a burden that the pastor must bear but is rather a gift that the pastor gratefully accepts from the Lord. Finally, the biblical pastor is an example to his flock (1 Pet. 5:3). The congregation can trust in their pastor because they know that he will lead by example in what he preaches from the pulpit. While these qualifications leave much room for personality, they also restrict the administration/leadership of the church into a fashion that glorifies God. The pastor administers/leads God's people based on the guidelines of Scripture.

The Response to Biblical Administration/Leadership

Godly administration/leadership in the church calls for a biblical response from the congregation. First, the members of a church are to obey those God has placed in administration/leadership (Heb. 13:17, 7, 24). This obedience is not only during convenient times but is also commanded when the pastor's decision is not the only viable option. The congregation members are instructed to "submit" which conveys the idea of obedience during times of disagreement within the local church. The congregation members must acknowledge that their pastor is accountable to God for how he has led them and that therefore the biblical pastor would never intentionally lead his congregation astray. Second, the congregation members are instructed to think about those in authority (Heb. 13:7). This would imply a consideration and concern for the pastor. Next, the congregation members are to follow their pastor (Heb. 13:7). This shows a trust in his judgment and a willingness to defer in matters of preference. Fourth, the congregation members are instructed to watch how the pastor finishes his life (Heb. 13:7). The trust congregations place in their pastor is not unfounded. It is not a blind trust but rather a deliberate trust based on the lifelong commitment of their pastor. One final responsibility of the congregation to their administrators/leaders is that they are to give them double honor (1 Thes. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:17). Not only are they to submit to the administrator/leader's choices but they are also to financially sustain the minister. The pastor administers/leads for the benefit of the people and the people willingly follow their pastor.

The pastor does not only preach/teach and administrate/lead his congregation but he also shepherds them. The pastor preaches/teaches his congregation because he cares for them. He also administrates/leads his congregation because he cares for them. Shepherding is the natural culmination of the other two responsibilities because it involves a personal relationship with the people of his church.

Pastor as Shepherd/Example

The pastor as shepherd/example is perhaps one of Christendom's favorite descriptions of the office. Indeed, the very term "pastor" originates from the Latin word "shepherd." If the pastor teaches his people and administrates the church body, he has begun the process of shepherding the flock God has given him. While preaching/teaching and administrating/leading look mainly to the New Testament for their biblical support, the concept of shepherding/example is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. God protects his flock both by direct intervention and by delegation to under shepherds. The biblical pastor as shepherd/example is both the follower of God's example of the learner of God's commands.

The Pastor as Shepherd/Example Reflecting God's Standard

The first example given in Scripture of a shepherd is God Himself. In Psalm 23 David summarizes God's shepherding by the simple phrase "I shall not want." God met all of David's needs. David goes on to state that God leads him in places of plenty that are peaceful (v. 2) which results in David's spirit being refreshed. Next, David states that God leads him in the way of righteousness (v. 3). David also states that God comforts him in "deep darkness" through both protection and correction (v. 4). David acknowledges that he as a sheep goes through hard times for different reasons. The "rod" was used for protecting the sheep and the "staff" was used for steering the sheep. The psalmist David clearly knew firsthand that God is a good shepherd. God provides for His sheep's wellbeing.

The pastor as under-shepherd reflects the attributes that God exemplifies as over-shepherd (1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17). Psalm 23 gives several examples of how the

pastor interacts with his “flock.” The pastor ministers to his congregation in a way designed to protect them from dangers (v. 2). Likewise, the pastor leads his congregation into spiritual refreshment through focusing on the undistracted and replenishing Word of God (v. 3). Additionally, the pastor points toward and leads his congregation to follow God’s morally just path (v. 3) and helps them through hard times resultant from external or internal causes (v. 4).

The Apostle John gives a further account of Jesus as Shepherd (John 10). Christ’s sheep know His voice and He knows them (v. 27a). Likewise the pastor is no stranger to the people of his congregation. They feel close to him and feel free to interact with him. Second, the sheep follow Christ because they know who He is (v. 27b). God views the position of shepherd as a relationship rather than merely a duty. The pastor builds a relationship with his sheep so that they learn to trust him. Next, Christ loves His sheep so much that he gives them eternal life so that they can live forever and so that they can be with him forever (v. 28). While the pastor cannot himself give his congregation eternal life, he should love them enough to show them Christ’s gift and help them lead others to that gift. No price or other persuasion will convince Jesus Christ to part with any of His sheep (v. 28). The pastor also views each member of his congregation with the worth that God gives: each member is precious. God wants a relationship with His sheep.

God is also the protector of His sheep. In Ezekiel 34 God delivers His flock and seeks His sheep. In this passage God is clear that the pastor as shepherd/example places the needs of his sheep above his own needs. He gathers them into his folds and makes them increase (Jeremiah 23:3). God desires that his sheep are unified and that they prosper. The pastor unifies his congregation in the Lord and helps them grow. In the gospels Christ is moved to compassion for the people of Israel because they were “as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, Mark 6:34). One intent of this passage is that all of those reading the passage should feel as Jesus felt and that some should meet the needs of those sheperdless people. Clearly, God is concerned for His sheep and provides for their day-to-day lives.

The Pastor as Shepherd/Example Obeying God's Commands

Not only does God give pastors an example to follow but he also gives them explicit commands about how to shepherd his sheep. Paul instructs Timothy to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith" (1 Tim. 4:12). This command can be split into three main categories: public ministry, public lifestyle, and personal characteristics. These three broad categories are interdependent on each other and cannot be successfully accomplished without the others. Each of these qualities must be carefully considered as the pastor fulfills God's commands.

Public Ministry

Christ states that Peter's public ministry to the sheep is an expression of love to Him (John 21:15-17). This same exhortation of care given to Peter is reciprocated to other leaders in the church: "feed the flock" (1 Peter 5:2). 2 Timothy 2:24 similarly states that the pastor must be "apt to teach." Paul's command to be an example "in word" (1 Tim. 4:12) encompasses all verbal communication whether it be to a group of 500 or to one person. While large groups are typically associated with public ministry, the parable of the lost sheep shows that the pastor's priority is with the one who needs his help the most (Mat. 18:11-14, Luke 15). The point is not the size of the group but rather the purpose of the ministry. Paul states that ministry is a daily opportunity (2 Cor. 11:28). Clearly God expects pastors to care for the spiritual nutrients of their sheep and help them grow in the Lord.

A negative example of public ministry is found in Ezekiel 34 and in Jeremiah 23 when God accuses the "pastors" in Israel of not feeding the sheep. These leaders knew that the sheep should be their primary concern but focused rather on their own profit. These men received a "woe" from the Lord and are promised that their evil will be visited upon them. God has not given the sheep to the shepherd but rather the shepherd to the sheep (Eph. 4:11). The pastor that pleases God is greatly blessed but the inverse is also true (Heb. 13:17). God closely oversees the public ministry of the pastor as shepherd/example.

The pastor's command to shepherd is challenged by both internal and external conflict (Acts 20:28-31). Paul warns that after he departs that "grievous wolves" will enter the fold trying to steal sheep. These predators are not God's children but either through a desire for wealth or power will enter the fold in an attempt to lead God's people astray. Similarly true sheep may choose to cause divisions and steal followings from the flock (v. 30). The pastor must be alert and bold in his protection of the sheep from damages originating both internally and externally. Clearly, public ministry is one aspect of shepherding that God expects of the pastor.

Public Lifestyle

Pastors live before their congregations as a shepherd/example. This model of shepherd/example is rarely found in the secular world. While most use positions of leadership to dominate those around them, the pastor is explicitly forbidden from doing so (1 Pet 5:1-3). The pastor is servant to his congregation and is a pattern of good works to his congregation (Titus 2:7). The Apostle Paul states that he was gentle in his ministry (1 Thes. 2:7, 2 Tim. 2:24). This gentleness was not due to the apostle's personality but rather to the gospel he had to give. Indeed, Paul states that he gave his all to the people because they were dear to him (v. 8). He worked both in the day and night to bring people the gospel. Likewise, the pastor must be a diligent worker. His driving goal is the wellbeing of his flock.

Personal Characteristics

The pastor's personal characteristics are also before the public eye of the flock. 1 Timothy 4:12 states that the pastor should be a shepherd/example in love, attitude, faith, and purity. To this list can be added the attributes of justice and holiness (1 Thes. 2:10); integrity, gravity, and sincerity (Titus 2:7); and patience (2 Tim. 2:24). These characteristics though impossible to perfect are the aspiration of every pastor. The personal characteristics of the pastor influence both his public ministry and how people view his lifestyle. Indeed, it is through a godly lifestyle that ministries are upheld when those who would oppose can find "no evil thing" to lay hold on (Titus 2:8).

Conclusion

The pastor is a shepherd/example to his congregation. This position was given to him by God and he, in turn, was given to a local body. The responsibility of shepherding and being a worthy example is a humbling task that can only be accomplished through studying the examples and principles found in the Bible, prayer, and by the grace of God. God enables His under-shepherds to fulfill their roles as preacher/teacher, administrator/leader, and shepherd/example as they seek to follow Christ.