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The Pastor's Roles : Complex and Challenging

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FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY



by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson

The Pastor's Roles: Complex and Challenging

Everything rises and falls on leadership. No church can ever rise beyond the leadership of its pastor. Pastors minister in a complex society with innumerable new challenges and pressures; therefore it is imperative that every pastor have a proper understanding of his role in the church. The role of the pastor has not changed since Pentecost, and he must maintain a biblical understanding of his role in the church as teacher, shepherd, and evangelist.

The Pastor As Teacher

One of the most important pastoral responsibilities is the role of pastor-teacher. The Bible states, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). When enumerating the divine enablements God had given to various members of the church, the apostle Paul notes, "And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). The word in the original language that is translated "pastor" is the Greek word for shepherd (*poimen*). This is a frequent and appropriate metaphor for those who have the charge of others in the church (Ezek. 34:2,9,10,23; 1 Peter 2:25; and Heb. 13:20). The duties of the pastor are to feed the flock with spiritual food and to see to it that they are protected from spiritual danger. Our Lord used the word in John 10:11,14 to describe His own work. He is ever the Chief Pastor (Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4) under whom men are called to "feed the flock of God" as undershepherds (1 Peter 5:2, cf. John 21:15ff; Acts 20:28). The word *pastor* denotes those men whose responsibility it is to feed, to protect, and to lead the church.

The one who shepherds God's flock is also a teacher of the Word, having both the task of shepherding and the gift of teaching the flock. The word for teacher (*didaskalos*) describes men who impart biblical truth and build the flock in the faith.

In 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul requires that a bishop be "apt to teach." Since instruction was to be a very vital part of the pastor's role in the early church, no one could submit himself to ordination who did not have the gift of teaching. However, the local church of the first century did not have a special class of pastors who did nothing but teach. These teachers are not to be distinguished from the pastor, but are pastors themselves. In Ephesians 4:11 the word for "pastors and teachers" forms a grammatical construction that indicates

that the two words refer to the same individual who possesses two gifts to serve the church. How can one leader be both pastor and teacher?

Do not neglect the rest of the Great Commission. Our Lord told us not only to disciple all nations and to baptize them, but He also told us to teach them to observe all the things He has commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). In spite of the traditional emphasis that the church has placed upon the teaching ministry, and in spite of an ever-growing Sunday school program, there has been a strange subordination of the teaching function as it relates to the pulpit in this twentieth century. Unfortunately, in many cases pastors have abdicated the teaching role to the Sunday school. This subordination is not a phenomenon due only to limitations of the preacher, but is a spiritual phenomenon due to a deeper underlying condition that robs a teaching ministry of its power. The great tradition of preaching that we have received from the Protestant Reformation demands that the pulpit assume a major responsibility for the teaching of the local church. Too frequently other things overshadow this responsibility and the teaching of the Word of God is persistently subordinated to "other things."

Learn how to teach the Bible. Christians today are looking for content. They want substance, reasons, structure, and practical application for their personal lives. How much content would we find if we analyzed all the sermons preached in America on any given Sunday? If a pastor is to be a teaching pastor he must commit himself to content-oriented sermons. Experience-oriented sermons flow from our pulpits with a greater amount of personal stories and dialogue than actual biblical content. What has caused this great absence of content preaching? Why are we now faced with nearly biblically illiterate congregations? The preacher-teacher cannot possibly develop a learned congregation if he will not expend the energy to study the Bible himself. Until he does, there will be little teaching of the Word!

Learn how to study the Bible. A pastor does not have to become a technical scholar in order to teach the Bible effectively. Today's pastor-teacher has more biblical reference works, commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries, and theological studies than were ever available before. One tragedy is that pastors who do not study tend to be easily influenced by theological error without realizing it. Others distort the true meaning of Scripture by using passages out of context.

Roles: Preaching

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Great Commission. In spite of the fact that the pastor is placed upon the growing Sunday school. This subordinate of the pulpit in this twent-ies pastors have ab-school. This subor- limitations of the n due to a deeper ing ministry of its at we have received ds that the pulpit aching of the local hadow this respon- God is persistently

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Some preachers actually masquerade under the banner of Fundamentalism, constantly announcing how true they are to the faith, without ever teaching their people what the faith is all about! Their so-called defense of the faith is usually limited to a shallow and scathing attack of other Fundamentalists. Rather than a biblically substantive defense of the faith, their sermons remind one of Shakespeare's indictment, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!"

Help your congregation develop a thirst for the Word of God. The teaching pastor must develop a thirst for the Scripture in order to instill that same thirst in His people. He must read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Bible. He must let the Word of God saturate his soul until he is aflame with its truth. His task is to preach the gospel to the lost and to teach and instruct the saved. Developing a thirst for and knowledge of the Bible cannot be learned in a "how-to" seminar. Becoming a student of the Word of God means rolling up one's intellectual sleeves and digging into the well of Scripture. When a church is full of saved members ready to learn, the pastor commits a sin of the highest magnitude not to be their teacher. A pastor who does not teach his church will not lead his church.

The Pastor As Shepherd

Comparing the pastoral ministry to the work of a shepherd is a common metaphor in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament priests and prophets are often referred to as being shepherds of God's people. In numerous passages they are rebuked for being unfaithful (Jer. 10:21; 23:1-3). God also promises a day when Israel will have true shepherds after God's heart. "I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall anything be lacking, saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:4).

Two-thirds of the Great Commission deals with the feeding, growing, and discipleship ministry.

The New Testament compares the pastor of the church and his ministry to that of a shepherd. Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus reminded Peter that his obligation was to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). In studying these biblical passages, two clear functions of the shepherd emerge. First, the shepherd is one charged with the responsibility of *feeding the sheep*. This is implied in the words of Christ to Peter, the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders, and the writings of Peter himself (1 Peter 5:1-4). The second clear function indicated by the metaphor of the shepherd is that of *over-*

sight. In both Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 the idea of oversight is connected to the concept of the shepherd. The original word utilized in both passages is *episkopos*, meaning an "overseer" or "guardian." Its basic meaning is one who cares for the needs of the sheep and watches out for any danger that may threaten the well-being of the sheep.

The priority of feeding the sheep. Feeding implies more than just a preaching ministry. It must be an ongoing ministry of meeting the spiritual hunger of the sheep. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is through an active discipleship ministry. There are churches that effectively evangelize the lost but place little emphasis on follow-up and feeding of new converts. One should remember that two-thirds of the Great Commission deals with the feeding, growing, and discipleship ministry, which includes not only getting people saved, but baptized and into a local Bible-believing church.

The priority of caring for the sheep. In Scripture the shepherd is portrayed as a tender, compassionate person. Paul and John refer to their beloved children in the faith (1 Cor. 4:14; 1 John 2:1). In today's highly complicated world, people are in need of a caring ministry from their pastor. As a shepherd and overseer of the flock of God, the pastor must take time to be a biblical counselor to his people. Personal visitation, soulwinning, and counseling are essential to an effective pastoral ministry.

The Pastor As Evangelist

Evangelism is the heartbeat of the local church. Paul encouraged young Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). When the fires of evangelism are extinguished in the pulpit, the church will begin to die. The ultimate objective of every church is world evangelism and the emphasis of the Great Commission must be the primary focus of the local church. The pastor cannot teach and lead people he does not have. We must win people to Christ in order to train them to win others. The six different methods used in the Bible to communicate the gospel must be implemented if the pastor is to be effective in his leadership.

Person to person. The ministry of Jesus Christ emphasized person-to-person soulwinning. This most effective way to communicate the gospel is illustrated in our Lord's dealings with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and so forth.

Group witnessing. In the Book of Acts are numerous instances where one person communicated the gospel to a group. For example, Peter preached the gospel to the household of Cornelius. Paul preached to the Philippian jailer's family. The pastor must seek opportunity to communicate the gospel to small groups of people. This can be effectively done in door-to-door visitation that emphasizes winning families to Christ.

Public proclamation of the gospel. The church started with a public meeting where the gospel was preached. As a result of Peter's message, 3,000 people were converted, baptized, and added to the church on the Day of Pentecost. The pastor must communicate the gospel in every message, because people will not be saved without a clear proclamation of the death, burial, and Resurrection of Christ.

Formal Bible reading and exposition. Jesus Christ and Paul utilized this method in the synagogue to proclaim the gospel. They read a passage of Scripture, and then made expository comments on it, leading the audience convictingly to the claims of God.

Confrontational preaching in a hostile setting. Stephen, Peter, and Paul utilized hostile settings in which to preach the gospel. In the decade of the eighties pastors will have ongoing opportunities to proclaim the gospel in hostile settings. This may include radio, television, and newspaper interviews; debates; public forums; and so forth. Confronted by a decadent society, pastors must let the light of the gospel shine into the darkness.

Apologetic evangelism. Paul utilized this method in reasoning with the philosophers at Mars Hill. Pastors will often have opportunity to present the gospel by making an apologetic defense of the Bible, Christ, and the gospel. In an age of academic emphasis it is important that every pastor be able to defend his beliefs publicly.

Regardless of the method involved, the pastor must make proof of his ministry by his commitment to evangelism. The New Testament clearly outlines the priority of evangelism. The words gospel (*evangelion*) and evangelize (*evangelidzo*) are frequently used in the New Testament. There are 177 references to these two words in the Bible. Paul described his own personal ministry 23 times as that of evangelizing. He said, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel [evangelize]" (1 Cor. 1:17).

The word *evangelize* means "to bring, announce, or proclaim good news." Thus, evangelism is bringing, announcing, and proclaiming the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again for our justification. The proclamation of this message must be the compelling desire and consuming passion of every pastor. When the people in the pew are captivated by the evangelism of the pastor, they themselves will catch that same spirit and follow his example. □



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