

The Pastor

Part I

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Introduction

"The commanding officer is responsible for all his troops do or fail to do." This quote is taken from the United States Marine Corps manual of instructions for a commanding officer. But let's think about it in the context of a church leader, and more specifically, a pastor. "A pastor is responsible for all his church and those in his congregation do or fail to do!"

Pastors occupy an awesome position in the church of Jesus Christ. They have the joy of seeing new people born into the Kingdom of God and the privilege of helping new believers mold their lives into the image of Christ. The pastor stands in the place of Christ in the church as he or she shepherds their congregation and sees them grow up in Christ.

However the office of the pastor also carries with it heavy responsibility. As we see from the above quote from the Marine Corp Manual, the pastor stand responsible before God Almighty for all that his church does or fails to do.

The Pastor in the New Testament

Let's begin the examination of the office of the pastor by looking at Scripture. The New Testament Greek word used for pastor is *poimen*. The literal translation of the word *poimen* means, "a helper, or feeder of sheep."¹ This Greek word appears 18 times in the New Testament. Surprisingly *poimen* is only translated once in the NIV as "pastor."

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." (NIV, emphasis added.)

The other 17 times the word *poimen* appears in the New Testament the NIV translates it as "shepherd." For example,

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mk 6:34 NIV, emphasis added.)

Evolution of the Term "Pastor"

The most common word used in the New Testament to describe church leaders was presbyter, or elder. The Greek word for presbyter is *presbuteros* which is usually translated as *elder*. Thus, elder appears to be the common term the New Testament used to describe anyone in church leadership or in spiritual authority. I find twenty-eight uses of the word elder as it applies to the New Testament church between Acts 11 and Revelation 22. In fact, both John and Peter, though they occupied the highest New Testament office as apostles, claimed the title of elder for themselves. John starts two of his epistles with the phrase, "The elder." (2Jo 1 and 3Jo 1) Peter wrote, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder ..." (1Pe 5:1 NIV) A common expression in Paul's epistles is, "... to appoint elders in every city."²

Thus by the end of the second century the term elder was

generally used to describe anyone in spiritual authority in the church, regardless of his or her specific ministry calling or position.

The much more common word used in the New Testament to describe the person in charge of a church was bishop. The Greek word for bishop is *episkopos*. The literal meaning of *episkopos* is overseer. The NIV Bible uses the word overseer seven times in the New Testament. Here are two examples.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: (Phi 1:1 NIV, emphasis added.)

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (1Ti 3:1 NIV, emphasis added.) (See also Acts 20:28, 1Ti 3:2, Tit 1:7, 1Pe 2:25 and 5:2.)

None of these verses make it clear whether there was only one or more than one overseer in the local church. The term bishop would have applied to the senior elder in a church or group of churches and was sometimes used interchangeably with pastor. But by the end of the second century the term bishop began to be used to describe someone who either had a large congregation or several churches under him.

By the mid-second century the rapid growth of the churches throughout the known world made it convenient to have a single official who represented the local congregation at regional or city-wide gatherings of clergy. So from among the elders of the church various churches began to elect a principle elder as the "permanent president" of the congregation. This person became known as the pastor/bishop.³ Eventually the term pastor came to designate the single individual with the authority over a specific church.

Let's take a quick look at how the role of deacons differs with that of pastor in the church. In Acts, 6 we read about the early church choosing seven men as deacons. The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos*, and it means one who renders a service to another or one who ministers. The verb form of the word is *diakonia*, and it means the act, or process of serving or ministering. Theologian W. Ewing⁴ gives us insight into the different roles of deacons versus pastors in ministry.

"The earliest fact we have about the organization of the Christian church is given in Acts, 6, where we are told "seven" men were appointed to what is called a "ministry of tables" . . . which is distinguished from the "ministry of the word" . . . This distinction between two different kinds of "ministry" which appears at the very beginning is seen to exist all through the apostolic church and beyond it into the sub-apostolic."

Thus the pastor is, in Ewing's words, among those who are

"ministers of the word." The deacons (and others in the church who serve in helps ministries) are more functional in their ministries.

Of course, Paul gives us the full job description of those called to the five-fold ministries, including pastors.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13 NIV)

Within this Ephesians 4 context, one of the most important responsibilities a pastor has is to minister God's word to his or her people. It is very important for the pastor to recognize this and to allow *nothing* to rob his or her time and attention to the study and preparation of the word to his congregation. This must be the pastor's first priority. Of course there will be times when some unavoidable circumstance will interfere with Bible study and sermon preparation. But every pastor should guard his study and preparation time carefully.

Shepherd

Scripture frequently uses the term shepherd to describe the love and care Jesus felt for His people. No other English term in Scripture equals the word *shepherd* when it comes to describing the loving, self-sacrificing care a pastor uses to oversee and minister to his congregation. The verb form of shepherd, *poimaino*, meaning, "to shepherd" is used to describe the function or work of a pastor. The literal translation of 1 Peter 5:2 says, "*Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight . . .*"⁵

Paul told the elders at Ephesus to, "*Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*" (Acts 20:28 NIV) The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament tells us what the word **shepherding** meant in the first century Middle East, the setting in which the Bible was framed.

"The shepherd goes before his flock, guides it, leads it to pastures and places where it may rest by the waters, who protects it with his staff, who whistles [calls] to the dispersed and gathers them, who carries the lambs in his bosom and leads the mother-sheep."

"To lead, to guide, to go before."

"Gathering the dispersed, righteous government and care for the weak."⁶

The Pastor Today

Now that we have looked at the Scripture and the unfolding of the office of the pastor, let us examine the call, the office, the character, and the ministry of the pastor in today's church.

1. The Call of the Pastor

Every minister of the Gospel must have the call of God to

the office. Indeed there will often be such hard times on the path of any ministry that the only thing sustaining the minister will be the knowledge that God has called him or her! God's call to the individual can take many forms. Perhaps He speaks to a person during an altar call, or in the privacy of prayer and meditation on the word, or through another person. But the one common element with each call is that everyone who is called by God *knows it is God calling*.

Each of us who are called to one of the five listed offices in Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, or evangelist) must have a specific understanding from the Lord as to which office he or she has been called. James tells us, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*" (1:5 NIV) So if you know God has put a leadership call on your life, but aren't sure what form it should take, continue to seek the Lord about it. He will be faithful to guide you into the proper role within His church.

2. Characteristics of a Pastor

I believe there are certain common characteristics of individuals who have a pastor's call. After considerable study and extensive up close observation of dozens of pastors over the years, I believe the following general observations are quite accurate and descriptive of mature pastors.

a. Identifies With the People

The mature pastor identifies with the people of God. He or she genuinely feels both the pain and the joy of his flock. This empathy is one of the reasons people feel free to go to their pastor in times of trouble. His identity with his people can be sensed and is greatly appreciated.

b. Loves the Church and the People of God

The call of the pastor encompasses great love for God's church and His people. He also will specifically and genuinely love his own congregation.

c. Flows in Great Mercy

The pastor has an abundance of mercy. It is this mercy that is one of the key and absolutely necessary ingredients for a successful pastorate. It is this mercy which enables the pastor to love and comfort the sinner, even in the midst of the sin.

d. Cares More About People Than Issues

While the pastor cares about issues which face the church, his primary focus is on people, his sheep. The pastor sees issues in very human terms, who will be pleased, who will be hurt or unhappy, and so on. Unfortunately, this approach can limit the effectiveness of a pastor in dealing with an issue or problem. That's why it is important for the pastor to have good, strong godly advisors who can help him weigh all the factors involved in any decision.

e. Focuses on the Sinner, Not the Sin

While the pastor is aware of the sin, and must be willing to

deal with it, the pastor's focus and intensity is on the people involved much more than on their sin. Again this can be a problem with those who, for example, have a prophetic call and are thus more focused on the sin than on the individuals involved.

3. The Office of the Pastor

The office of pastor is a sacred position. It is the office of the pastor as the head of the local church that elevates the person of the pastor. There may be other ministers, even apostles and prophets, in a local church *but the one who occupies the office of pastor is in charge of and responsible for that congregation.* (This is not to say that the apostle or prophet may not exercise spiritual authority over the pastor *as an individual* from time to time.)

This position of pastor gives the one who occupies it great authority over the congregation. The pastor's authority is truly an extension of God's authority. This authority is to be used for the building up of the church. Most regrettably this same authority can be wrongfully used to abuse the church. Paul referenced this on one occasion referring to the authority of his office as an apostle. He wrote, *"This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down."* (2 Co 13:10 NIV, *emphasis added.*) Every pastor must be willing to use this God-given authority, but he or she must also have a righteous fear of God of ever abusing it. It is a horrible thing to abuse God's sheep.

4. The Character of the Pastor

In an ideal world, every pastor should be able to say to his congregation the same thing Paul said, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."* (1Co 11:1 NIV) Paul's words must be the goal of every pastor. However I like a quote I recently heard attributed to C.S. Lewis as it relates to a pastor, "Think of me as a fellow patient in the same hospital who, having arrived a little earlier, could give some advice."

The pastor's personal life should be one of godly purity in his or her family and community. This is not to say he never sins! No, we are still in this body of flesh and fall prey to its weaknesses daily. But a godly pastor may not harbor glaring character flaws and on-going sin. The office he occupies *demand*s that he or she live a life of purity before his immediate family, the church, and the local community.

Scripture gives us two almost identical lists that are to be used for the character qualifications of a pastor. They are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Let us briefly look at each of these qualifications.⁷

a. Above Reproach

Here Scripture is saying that a pastor is to be above any act or condition that would open him to blame, rebuke or anything that would bring shame to himself, his family, or his church.

b. One Wife

In the first century polygamy was common. In view of the prevailing social conditions in the world of the first century

church, it seems to me that husband of one wife here refers to polygamy rather than divorce and remarriage. However I respect the opinion of those who do not agree.

c. Sober, Not Given to Drunkenness

Webster's dictionary defines sober as, "To be temperate or sparing in the use of alcoholic liquor, not drunk, temperate in any way; not extreme or extravagant, serious, solemn, not garish or flashy; quiet; plain: said of color, clothes, etc. not exaggerated or distorted . . . characterized by reason, sanity, or self-control; showing mental or emotional balance."

Of course, the most obvious meaning of not given to drunkenness means that one is not to get drunk. In today's world that would include both drugs and alcohol.

d. Self-controlled

To be self-controlled means to be able to be in command over oneself, one's emotions, desires, words, actions, etc.

e. Respectable

To be respectable means to be worthy of esteem, to be able to conform to socially acceptable behavior and attitudes.

f. Hospitable

To be hospitable means to be kind, friendly and solicitous towards guests, favoring the health, growth, comfort, etc. of others, especially of new arrivals.

g. Not Violent

To be violent means to act with physical force so as to injure, damage or destroy; to act with strong feeling or emotion; to be vehement or furious.

To be not violent means the opposite of these things. It means to refrain from acts of physical force or of showing strong angry feelings or emotions in a physical way.

h. Gentle

To be gentle means to be refined, courteous, kind, serene, patient, not violent, harsh or rough.

i. Not Quarrelsome

To be quarrelsome means one is inclined or ready to argue with others; it implies verbal strife marked by anger and hostility.

To be not quarrelsome means to be able to get along with others, to refrain from verbal abuse or meanness of speech.

j. Not Loving Money

Everyone realizes that it takes money to exist in today's world. I understand that. But Paul speaks of not loving money. *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* (1Ti 6:10 NIV)

k. Manage His Own Family Well

A pastor's family is to be in order. The pastor's spouse is

to be fully supportive of the ministry call. The pastor's children are to be decent and orderly.

Let me add a word here about the pastor's responsibility to protect his wife and children. For every pastor, as with every Christian, God should come first, his family second, and his ministry work third. A pastor's family needs his love, his protection, his support, and his attention.

l. Children Obey Him with Proper Respect

Paul's admonition here is quite plain. His words are intended to portray a family whose children are under proper control. Paul is stating that a pastor's children are to be in subjection, they are to obey and respect him. This applies to all children *who are still living at home*. I don't think it is valid to hold a pastor responsible for the misconduct of his grown children, especially for children who are unbelievers.

m. Not A Recent Convert

Many young people will receive a call to ministry soon after conversion, then immediately attempt to enter the call. This is what Paul is cautioning against here. Young converts are highly subject to their own flesh as well as the devil's multiple snares, particularly pride. What Paul is urging here is a waiting period of a few years to allow for the maturing of the future minister. This admonition also applies to older converts who receive a call to ministry.

n. Good Reputation with Outsiders

Finally, Paul is saying that those who enter the ministry should have a good reputation among non-believers. In other words, a pastor should be highly esteemed in the community at large.

The above list is an excellent guide for considering the qualifications of a pastor. I believe that this list is to be a goal, or standard, by which we are to measure ourselves and those whom the Lord has called to ministry. However, few if any of us will qualify on all points of this list! So do not look for or expect perfection. You won't find it in yourself or anyone else!

In Part II of this teaching we will examine the actual ministry of the pastor, the possible weaknesses of the pastor, and the congregation's relationship with their pastor.

Lord, we want to take a moment and lift our pastors before You. We thank You that they are called to prepare Your people to serve You more fully, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. Lord, bless our pastors, guide them, and strengthen them as we all become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Amen!

1. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Page 2258.
2. There are those who persuasively argue that the early church had a plurality of elders and that no single elder was in charge or over the other elders. Because this was so, they say, the proper Biblical model for church leadership today is a council of elders. However, as church history moved into the second century and beyond it is evident that the Holy Spirit orchestrated the concept of one person, the pastor, being in charge of and responsible for one church.
3. *Ibid*, page 2060.
4. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. Volume 3, Page 2057.
5. *The Interlinear Dictionary of the New Testament*, By George Ricker Berry, Ph.D, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Page 602.
6. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, By Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedereich, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. Volume 6, pages 486-487.
7. Many of the following definitions have been taken from *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, David B. Guralnik, Editor in Chief, William Collins + World Publishing Co., Inc.

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