

# The Pastor

Part II

September 1997

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There is a joke going around that goes something like this. "Did you know that the pastor's job is the easiest in the world? Know why? The pastor only works on Sunday mornings!" Well, if you have ever been a pastor, or have ever known one well, you know that the pastor's position and call is one of the most demanding yet rewarding in the church.

In Part I of this teaching article we examined 1) the call of the pastor, 2) the characteristics of a pastor, 3) the office of the pastor as one of the Ephesians 4:11-13 five-fold ministries, and 4) the character of the pastor.

We continue our study with the ministry of the pastor which is topic 5 in this two part teaching.

## 5. The Ministry of the Pastor

Let's now address what a pastor actually does. Although the duties of a pastor will vary from church to church, I will set forth some of the universally agreed upon functions of all pastors.

**a. Preaching** - All true pastors preach the Word of God. The object of preaching is to motivate the listeners to action. At the completion of a sermon people should have a clear call set before them that demands action on their part. Good preaching spurs action such as to stop sinning, to repent, to study the Bible more, to deal with anger, lust or greed, to worship God more, and so on. We must motivate the listeners through our preaching.

Everyone who preaches should strive for excellence in content, completeness, form of delivery, accuracy and clarity of speech. Every preacher should have a close, trusted friend to whom he gives the liberty to provide honest critiques of his sermons. My wife does this for me. She listens carefully for inaccuracies, exaggerations, and repetitions as well as for points that weren't as clear as they could have been. She also listens for what we call "speech crutches." Speech crutches are phrases that are often repeated through the sermon that quickly become abrasive to listeners. For example, I tend to open each new topic with, "Now. . ."

Here are some common speech crutches I hear:

"Somebody say amen!"

"Turn to someone and say \_\_\_\_\_."

"How many of you know that \_\_\_\_\_."

Pastors, admonitions or personal critiques may be ego-deflating or offensive to you, but if you do not allow any-one to critique your sermons in this manner you are doing yourself and your congregation a great disservice.

Let me also urge you not to copy the preaching styles of another preacher whom you admire. By copying I mean using the same tone of voice, same phrases, even using the same funny stories. My counsel: DON'T DO IT! Be yourself in the pulpit.

One final thought on preaching: when you preach speak boldly and authoritatively! Scripture actually tells us to do so. Peter wrote, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. . . he should do it with the strength God provides, so in all things God may be praised. . ." (1Pe 4:11

NIV)

**b. Teaching** - One of the other five-fold ministries is a teacher. (The office of the teacher will be examined in detail in another teaching article.) The difference between preaching and teaching is this: Preaching motivates us to act, teaching tells us how to act. The object of teaching is to bring clear understanding. Teaching should tell the listener how to stop sinning, stop lust, stop coveting, and so forth. Then it tells him or her how to start living a Christ-like life, how to overcome the enemy, and how to overcome the various sins in his life.

Some pastors are more gifted at teaching than others. If a pastor is unable to effectively teach, he should find someone, preferably from within the church, who has a teaching call and have that person teach. Obviously, if the church is large, there should be several teachers. Regardless of who does it, it is vital that every church have an active, structured, on-going teaching program for every age group.

**c. Mentoring** - One very important task a pastor has is mentoring. By mentoring I mean being a wise, loyal advisor and teacher to other, less mature Christians. A pastor should constantly be looking for people who have a call to ministry. He should make it a practice to train these people. He or she should spend time with them, teach and encourage them.

**d. Counseling** - Counseling is another basic function of a pastor. It is natural for Christians to seek the counsel and wisdom of their pastor for the personal problems in their lives and families. Many pastors find counseling to be the most time-consuming part of their ministry.

Here are some helpful pointers about counseling:

1. Not all pastors are able counselors. Don't assume the gift of counseling just because you are a pastor. While some are more naturally able than others, good counseling is a skill that must be learned through prayer, study and experience.
2. Some people don't want answers for their problems. They just want the attention they receive through counseling.
3. Pastors should never counsel a person of the opposite sex alone, or in unsupervised conditions. . . don't give the devil such a wonderful opportunity!
4. Never air from the pulpit, or reveal to anyone, what you learned in counseling. In so doing you destroy the very foundation of successful counseling which is confidentiality.
5. Don't be disappointed when people reject or fail to follow your counsel. Only those who desperately want victory will be eager to obey your counsel and the word of God.

**e. Managing and Administrating** - One of the inherent responsibilities all pastors have is managing the affairs of the church he or she is pastoring. Frankly, many find this to be the most unpleasant part of ministry. However, if this job is left undone or poorly done, it will become a limiting factor in God's ability to bless a church with numerical or financial growth.

**Financial Management** - It is not good policy for the pastor to personally handle the money of the church. I don't think the

pastor should even be a part of the group which handles the money. If possible, delegate the handling of money to deacons. . . always insuring that two or more are present when the offerings are counted and reported. This robs the enemy of the opportunity to tempt and accuse.

**Administrative Management** - Things such as correspondence, meeting schedules, purchase of supplies, record keeping, and so forth are also part of management. The gift of administration is one of the gifts listed separately from the call of the pastor. (1 Cor 12:28) But every pastor must do some administration. If he or she doesn't, the church pays a price.

Frankly, some pastors do not have good administrative skills. If this is so, he or she needs to acknowledge this lack and seek out someone in the congregation who does have these skills and empower him to oversee the administrative affairs of the church.

**f. Guarding** - Just as a shepherd guards his flock against anything that will harm his sheep, so also must a pastor guard his people against anything that will harm them.

Let's look at Paul's final, heartrending counsel to the overseers of the church at Ephesus.

*"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So **be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (Act 20:28-31 NIV, emphasis added)*

These words of Paul's should cause every pastor to be vigilant.

Here are some of the other things Scripture tells us to guard against:

*". . . Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is **hypocrisy.**" (Luk 12:1 NIV, emphasis added.)*

*"Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of **greed**; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'" (Luk 12:15, emphasis added.)*

*"Watch out for **false prophets.** They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Mat 7:15 NIV, emphasis added.)*

*"Jesus answered: "Watch out that **no one deceives you.**" (Mat 24:4 NIV, emphasis added.)*

*"I urge you, brothers, to watch out **for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.**" (Rom 16:17 NIV, emphasis added.)*

*"Watch out for those dogs, **those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.**" (Phi 3:2 NIV, emphasis added.)*

*"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1Ti 4:16 NIV, emphasis added.)*

A good pastor will continually be on guard against the dan-

gers listed above. If the enemy knows a pastor will take immediate scriptural action, he is far less likely to use these tactics against a church. However, if a pastor is uninformed, weak or fearful, the enemy will be relentless in attacking his flock! **Be on guard!**

**g. Discipline** - By far the most unpleasant task a pastor must do is to discipline errant sheep. In fact, it is so unpleasant many pastors simply do not discipline. No pastor wants to do it. No true pastor likes it. But if a church is to remain healthy, it must be done from time to time.

As to how to discipline, Paul gave excellent instructions:

*"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should **restore him gently.** But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (Gal 6:1 NIV, emphasis added.)*

Thus we see that the object of church discipline is restoration. If one of our toes gets sore and swells up none of us would want to cut it off, would we? No! We would do everything within our power to heal it. So it should be with sinful church members.

But if the toe has gangrene we must cut it off or the whole body will perish. Some people will not repent of their sin. Simply stated, when all biblical means of correction have failed, and there is still no repentance, it is then proper to consider more severe discipline. Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5, and Galatians 6:1 should be your guide. Of course, properly administered discipline will involve not only the pastor but the elders of the church as well.

There is a second reason why discipline is vital to the church. It preserves the spiritual health of the church. As Paul told the church at Corinth, *"Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast. . . ." (1Co 5:6-7 NIV)*

## 6. Weaknesses of Pastor

Every human being who occupies any of the five-fold offices has weaknesses. No one is in perfect balance. The pastor is no exception. So the following is a list of weaknesses pastors often have. Obviously I am not saying that every pastor has all of these weaknesses. However, if you are a pastor, allow the list to be a spiritual mirror. If the Holy Spirit quickens certain of the items to you, you should take corrective action.

**a. Improper Use of the Pulpit** - The pulpit is sacred. Abusing the privilege of standing in God's pulpit is very serious. One church I preached in had an inscription inside the lectern where the speaker would see it when he approached. It read, "Sir, we would see Jesus." May it be so in every pulpit around this world.

Unfortunately, some pastors have a habit or tendency to tell individuals things from the pulpit that they don't have the courage to tell them to their face. This should never be done! Never rebuke or admonish individuals from the pulpit unless you have spoken extensively to them in private and only then if there is no repentance.

Never use the pulpit to criticize or put people down. Never use the pulpit to exalt yourself or members of your family. Never use the pulpit for personal gain such as letting the people know of a financial or other need you may have.

**b. Financial Abuse** -Some pastors control all of the money in the church. They allow no one else to know how much money is taken in the offerings or to know how much he or she takes as a wage. This is wrong! All proper financial accounting in a church should involve the deacons. A church treasurer should be selected from among the deacons. All finances should be dealt with in openness and honesty.

**c. Family Run Churches** -From time to time I have seen churches that were "owned and operated" by a single family. That is not right. Every church belongs to God, not to a person and certainly not to that person's family. While there may be a legitimate reason to start a church using only family members, as soon as the church begins to grow it is very important to begin placing qualified non-family members in positions of authority within the church. Good, healthy church leadership will be composed of people from within the community in which it is located.

**d. Only Disciplining Sexual Sin** -The Bible lists many things that are sin: greed, gossip, love of money, gluttony, stealing, lying, just to name a few. But I have observed, even among Bible believing churches, that very few pastors will discipline for any reason other than blatant sexual sin. I know of a church in which the pastor self-increased his salary to an exorbitant level, ran the church into debt paying his salary and then left the church! Yet his denominational brethren did nothing! In my view this is blatant greed and is grounds for church discipline. I'm sure if this same pastor had engaged in sexual sin, his brethren would have disciplined him!

**e. Fear of Man** -The fear of man is a subtle thing. Usually it creeps in without us knowing it. A pastor has been overtaken with the fear of man when he is overly concerned about the opinions of others, or when he changes activities or procedures within the church because of one person's comment. The Bible clearly teaches us that there is only one being we are to fear -- God! Proverbs 29:25 says, "*Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*" (NIV)

A pastor who will not preach on certain subjects because he fears repercussions or that he will lose some people has a problem with the fear of man. A pastor must approach the pulpit as boldly as would Moses! Whatever the Holy Spirit gives him or her to preach he is to proclaim without apology. Yes, some people may not like it and may even leave the church, but does not the Bible say,

*"...the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Heb 4:12 NIV, emphasis added.)

Paul faced this accusation from the Galatians head on. He asked, "*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*" (Gal 1:10 NIV, emphasis added)

Paul is saying that if he is a man-pleaser he cannot be a servant of Christ! The two are mutually exclusive. Lord, may we learn to fear You alone!

**f. Fear of Losing Pastorate** -Some pastors fear losing their position. This fear can be manifested in a number of ways. One of them is that he or she rarely if ever allows anyone else to preach in the pulpit. He makes all the announcements, does all preaching, teaching and, if so talented, even does music! Our security must be in the Lord, not in the position of pastor.

**g. Loses Vision Easily** -One of the very special gifts of a pastor is that of intense care for his sheep, individually and collectively. His job is to nurture the people the Lord has given him. But herein lies the problem. Sometimes, as months turn into years, continually dealing with people's problems reduces the pastor's vision. He begins to see and preach only the immediate to the neglect of any larger vision. The vision for his city or region given him by the Lord years ago has faded from memory. A good leader has a vision or burden from the Lord and is continually guiding his people toward that God-given goal.

**h. Undue Political Involvement** -I have taken great care in writing this section. First I want to state the principles involved, then I will address the legitimate exceptions.

The general principle is this: preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and preaching politics do not mix. Nowhere in the New Testament is there even a hint of Paul, Peter, John, or any other church leader ever showing the slightest concern for worldly political endeavors. Certainly Jesus did not. Few Christians today suffer as did Paul. He was persecuted more by the government of his day than most Christians are today. Yet we never heard a word from him criticizing the Roman government. Even while he was in the Roman prison he regarded himself as "the prisoner of Christ." Furthermore, he ran a very effective prison ministry from within!

Rather than politics, Paul's emphasis always remained the gospel, for he wrote, "*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" (1Co 2:2 NIV)

I am sorry to say that in America today, some Christians who are involved in political causes or with political beliefs try to make them all "Christian" causes or beliefs. They are not. It is easy to make political statements from the pulpit. If you do so regularly you will eventually end up with a congregation that agrees with you. Why? Because those who don't will leave. But that is not biblical. You are preaching the gospel plus your own personal political views. Do not fall prey to this life-strangling practice!

Now for possible exceptions. I know that there are countries today in which Christianity is not only illegal but earns believers mandatory prison or even death. There are other countries which systematically oppresses Christianity. In these settings a pastor does what he must do as the Holy Spirit guides and empowers. But even if you are in such a nation, remember that the real enemy is the spiritual forces of darkness behind the oppressive government. Therefore the primary battlefield must always be spiritual, not political.

### **Even Pastors Can Be Stumbling Blocks**

All pastors need to realize that there are times when the Lord wants to move a church in a new or fresh direction. This can

mean anything from changing the format of the Sunday morning service to leading the pastor to retire or move on to a new church and allow someone else to take over as pastor.

But for a number of reasons, many pastors strongly resist any change. They like things the way they are, or they are too busy to hear the Lord's prompting voice, or they are just too comfortable to want to try something new. Since the Christian life is a walk of faith, often the word of the Lord is simply, "Do this" without further leading. This usually means stepping out of security into insecurity!

If a pastor refuses to listen to the still small voice telling him it is time for a change, the pastor has become a stumbling block to the church. He is no longer helping the church, but rather he is hindering it. All of us have free will. God does not force us to obey. He simply, quietly asks us to do His will. The ultimate choice is ours. Pastors are no different. Like the rest of us, if they don't obey God, He is not pleased. It is then that the church itself suffers.

The problem is that most people in the church never know what is going on in the spiritual realm. They only know that the church services no longer have the life in them they once had. But the spiritually mature know. The Holy Spirit quietly reveals the problem to them.

What is a church to do in such circumstances?

Among the spiritually mature are the church elders. It is the primary responsibility of the church elders to communicate with the pastor what they are hearing the Holy Spirit say. Most often this is the push that is needed to produce obedience. Remember, the pastor is not God's enemy, he simply may be slow to obey.

However, if the elders fail to move or fail in their effort, it then becomes a matter for the spiritually mature to begin fasting and praying for God to undertake sovereignly. However, no one has the liberty to approach God in prayer without a pure heart in this matter! By this I mean there should be no anger, malice or vindictiveness towards the pastor in the hearts of those fasting and praying. Neither can there be a gossip campaign among the people. That is flesh and is very displeasing to God. This must be a spiritual matter. Remember, God placed the pastor in the pulpit and because of that he or she is worthy of our honor and respect. Our job is to pray that God's will be done in our churches. He will answer in His time!

### **Conclusion**

The office of the pastor is a powerful position, full of both valley and mountain top experiences. But one thing is certain, our pastors need our prayers.

Lord, first I want to thank you for the countless pastors you have called to serve your people. We acknowledge that they have spiritual authority over your churches and we honor their office, their call, and their person.

Lord, guide them, bless them, and empower them to lead your church in these perilous times. Empower every pastor to listen to your Holy Spirit and then be quick to obey your direction. Continue to give our churches leaders who will move in Your mighty power and who will have the courage to preach the gospel until You return! Amen.

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