

How to Recognize a Good Pastor

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As part of the retreat, I was asked to do a question and answer time and I ended up only answering one question, but the one question was very, very strategic and it said this. What would you recommend to a church that is in the process of seeking a full time preacher—by which he meant a pastor—who is dedicated to teaching the Word of God in full and shepherding the flock of God.

I had a little bit of time to put an answer together from that. And some material from our own pastor John MacArthur sparked some of my thinking as I put an answer together. But as I was putting the answer together I realized that it was a message that I wanted to preach here and I wanted to share these things here.

Ultimately that is a very, very strategic question for everyone who has any interest in spiritual life whatsoever. How can you recognize a good pastor? The importance of the answer to that question can't be overstated because leadership is what shapes the direction of any organization. You have a good leader, the organization is going to follow in his way. If you have a bad leader, there is really no way to make up for that.

How can you recognize a good pastor in a church? How can you recognize a man that you should follow in spiritual life is really the question that they were asking. And I appreciated the heart of the person. They want to be biblical and they wanted someone who would lead them into the things of Christ.

And so I shared some of the things that I am going to share with you here today at that time.

But before I could actually get up here and teach this here, I had to cross a threshold question. Why such a message in this environment when we have an established pastor like John MacArthur? Why a message like this when even in GraceLife we have a man like Phil Johnson who is a world Christian leader in his own right?

Well, I needed to answer that question. And it is important for this to be said here from the GraceLife Pulpit. First of all, our congregation is not static. We have people that come and go and we have people that are here just recently over the past year or two who have left other churches and where they had difficulties and now are coming in and

wanting to grow in Christ. They need to hear this message. We have new people who need to be established in fundamental truths.

Secondly, our own people, people that have been here for a long time, move on or plan to move on in the near future and they need to look for churches in the places to which the Lord is leading them. What do they look for in a pastor?

We have young people in our midst, our future leaders who don't have the benefit of the past 30 or 40 years of John MacArthur's teaching and the past 10 years of teaching in GraceLife from Phil Johnson and others. They need to learn the ropes. They need to be built up in Christ and to know what to look for in a leader.

And beyond that, from time to time, people outside of GraceLife sometimes hear these messages and can benefit from them. We have men in seminary who have aspirations for going into ministry. What should they be setting their hearts on? What do they aim their life at?

There is a multitude of reasons to speak to this topic here in GraceLife is what I realized. And even for those of us who have been here for a while and, like me, intend to be here for the indefinite future, it refreshes us. The answer to that question refreshes us on the purpose of the Church and it refreshes us on what our own individual aspirations should be in following Christ because God looks for in a pastor, what God works out in the life of a true godly pastor is really not that much different, it is not different from what he wants in each of your lives as well. They are fundamental, spiritual characteristics.

Just last week, eight, nine days ago that my wife was hit by a drunk driver while she was driving our car and driving our son home a mile from our house. It was just a fresh reminder that you don't know how much time you truly have. And there is a certain urgency that I feel every time that I step into this pulpit, not presuming that I have got another 20 years of ministry with you.

And so I want to do what I can to supplement what John MacArthur has done so well for so many years, to put a fence around you, each one of you that are in here and know Christ, to protect you and to help you and to guard you from the myriad of people, the myriad of men who would in one sense claim the name of Christ, but in other ways betray the very purpose of their calling. And you need to recognize the elements of a good pastor so you know who to follow and who to turn away from even if you can't necessarily articulate everything that might be wrong in a certain person's ministry.

But when our world has prominence, when the Christian Evangelical Church is given prominence to cussing pastors, to prosperity preachers who promise you healing or promise you financial prosperity if you will just give them a little bit of moolah—funny how that works—pastors who want to pursue social issues and political issues rather than the biblical priorities of a pastor, when we deal with pastors who want to put their premium on humor and gimmicks and setting beds up on their stage for crying out loud to talk about marriage issues and things like that, putting props up just designed to shock

and titillate their audience. In a world where the Christian church has allowed men like that to rise to great prominence for the flock that God has put to me to preach to from time to time, I want to put a fence around you and help you understand why all of that stuff is wrong, why you can safely turn away no matter what kind of manipulation they might try to put on you and to lead you and to help you in such a way that you can avoid those men who never get around to leading you to a true and deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and building you up in him. That is why I am preaching this message here today.

I feel compelled to speak to these things.

Now last year when I was finishing up my series on the Sermon on the Mount as part of the closing series of that I did a message titled, "How to Recognize False Teachers," from Matthew 7:15-20. And this is kind of the companion message on a positive side to that and to kind of have one on each side is what I am happy to be able to put together here.

But just to kind of set the stage and enter into our topic a little more deeply here, understand that the Bible commands all believers—including all of us, you and me—to be on guard against false teachers, that there would be a proliferation of men who would claim to speak for God, but would only be wolves in sheep's clothing. They put on the dress, the garb, the outward appearance of a true man of God, but inwardly they have other motivations to abuse those who would follow them, to take advantage of them, to use them for power, for girls, for gold and for glory. And the Bible warns us to be on guard because of the spiritual threat that such men like that represent.

Matthew 7:15 says, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."¹

The apostle John in 1 John 4:1 says.... The Bible just pleads with you. If I could just put it in really colloquial language, "Don't be a sucker for everyone that comes along and claims to speak for God."

1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."²

And so the Bible warns us, tells us to take this matter seriously. What we are talking about is how can you have discernment to know who truly speaks for God and who is an imposter.

Well, today's message is designed to help you recognize a pastor who is truly sent from God. If God warns us against false teachers, then how can we recognize a good pastor? And I want to say something here as well, is to say that some people because of the proliferation of problem pastors and all of that, they just lump them all together and

¹ Matthew 7:15.

² 1 John 4:1.

throw up their hands and say, “I quit. They must all be bad. They must all be untrustworthy,” and they just check out.

That is not the right response. Then the truth of the matter is that in the Bible God has given you what you need to know to be able to find, to be able to look for, to be able to measure a man and see whether he is truly a man that God has sent as a pastor or not.

If this is important to God, you would expect him to give you very clear guidance on this issue in the Bible and he has; clear unmistakable guidance in the Scriptures that would help you recognize a good pastor, one truly sent from God.

And here is the starting point. Here is the starting point for all of it. Remember this fundamental fact, that the Church of Jesus Christ, everyone who truly has received Christ, who has turned from sin and embraced him as their Lord, their Savior, their master and are resting and trusting in his righteousness and his shed blood alone as their righteousness before God, trusting in him alone to merit access to God, those people, that spiritual body belongs to Christ. They belong to him. The Church is what Jesus Christ purchased with his own blood, Acts 20 verse 28 says. Christ bought the Church with his own life and blood, with his resurrection. The Church belongs to him. It is his Church. It is not a pastor’s church. You are not my flock. You belong to Christ.

And so because the Church belongs to Christ, we must choose pastors according to Christ’s criteria, to the standards that Christ has established, what Jesus wants. That is pretty basic and fundamental, isn’t it? Isn’t that obvious? If it belongs to Christ then the people that would lead the Church of Christ should conform to the pattern that Christ himself has set.

Isn’t that simple? It is simple. This is easy. And so there is an implication from that that you need to understand. The pastor’s job, the pastor’s responsibility is not to be what the world wants him to be.

What the unsaved religious editors in major newspapers say about what a church should or shouldn’t be doing, what a pastor should or shouldn’t say is absolutely irrelevant. It is absolutely irrelevant. They have no prerogative whatsoever to speak into the Church and say what the Church should be if they don’t love Christ because that is not their Church. The Church belongs to Christ and so what he says is the only thing that matters, what his criteria are, are the preeminent priorities.

And stated in a different way and with a twinkle I my eye, you might say, it is not the pastor’s job to satisfy the grouchiest person in the congregation and make them happy because that is just a, you know, the priority is vertical for the pastor. He is responding to the responsibilities that Christ has laid upon him and the fact that there are unsanctified people in a large congregation, none of them within the walls of this room, mind you.

I said I was saying this with a twinkle in my eye, ok? Don’t be unhappy with me.

The pastor's first priority is to say, "What does Christ want?" And to not be tossed to and fro by people who say you need to take care of this, you need to do that. Those things may have their place in time, but he has to be clear on these fundamental priorities. The pastor must be what Christ wants him to be first and foremost. That is the most significant thing. That is an easy point.

And so where do we go from here? Well, as we consider what a good pastor looks like, how to recognize a pastor, I want to give you four characteristics to look for, four characteristics of a good pastor. Stated differently, four traits of a biblical pastor, four ways that you can recognize a pastor that Christ himself has truly established in the Church. And it all comes straight from Scripture and it is all very simple and fundamental and, frankly, easy to recognize when you know what to look for.

Four things, all of them alliterated to start with the letter C.

First of all, a good pastor must, number one, he must be a man of Christ. He must be a man of Christ. And to lead you into the Scriptures now, look to the gospel of John chapter 21. We spent some time there back in September on this passage where Jesus restored Simon Peter to ministry after Jesus' resurrection, after Simon's denials before the crucifixion. Jesus restored Simon Peter and commissioned him to ministry and here in this passage you see a pattern for what should be a true mark of every pastor.

John 21 verses 15 through 17. I will just read the passage real quickly.

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. "³

He commissions Peter to his apostolic ministry to care for the flock of Christ, to care for Christ's own sheep. And what I want you to see in this passage is so basic and so fundamental, but the point of character that Jesus established clearly from Peter's lips as an expression of what was truly in Peter's heart was that he loved Christ. He loved Christ preeminently. There were... he had no divided loyalties. His premiere love in his heart was for Jesus Christ himself. And that is the dominant requirement to be a shepherd of Christ's flock, because—follow me here.

When it is clear in your mind—as it is from what we said earlier—that the Church, the spiritual body belongs to Christ and that they are his people, they are his flock, when that is clear in your mind and that they belong to him, then obviously the person who would be the one who would oversee the flock, who would be responsible for leading them and protecting them and guarding them and teaching them must be someone who shares the priorities of Christ, who loves Christ, because if he is faithful to Christ, then he is going to be faithful to Christ's people. That is the idea.

And so preeminently, a pastor must love Christ first of all, because if he loves Christ he will love the people who belong to Christ. And if he does not love Christ, if Christ is not the first and preeminent love of his heart, nothing else can make up for it. Nothing can make up for a man not loving Christ. And if a man is a pastor and he doesn't love Christ he needs to resign immediately. There is no room in the pastorate for a man who is not preeminently loving and following and loyal to Christ because the Church belongs to Christ. It is his. And so you care for the Church on behalf of the one whom you love preeminently. That is the idea.

If a pastor loves Christ then he will care for the sheep like Christ would want them to be cared for. So he has to be a man of Christ.

How do you test that?

I am going to try to give you some practical application to help you discern these things. How do you test that? How do you know if a man loves Christ?

Well, let's just limit it to his public pulpit ministry. Here is what you do. Listen to a broad cross section of his sermons over time with different messages and different topics. You don't necessarily go up to a pastor and ask him directly, "Do you love Christ?" because he is going to know that he has to answer yes to that question whether he really does or not. That is a little too direct.

A good pastor will have a proven history of preaching Christ because, listen. What a man loves, when he is given an opportunity to speak to a group of people, what a man loves is going to come out of his mouth at that time. If he loves Christ and he recognizes the

³ John 21:15-17.

preeminence of Christ, then he is going to be internally compelled to speak about Christ when he has opportunity to speak to you. If he gets up and puts on a song and dance routine, tries to tell you funny jokes, tells story that makes him where he is always the hero of his own stories, he is showing you what he really loves when he speaks that way because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. And a man who has an opportunity to preach to people who is a good pastor is going to preach to them about Christ and teach them about Christ over time. He will explain to you the person of Christ, the work of Christ. He is going to call you to salvation in Christ. He is going to call you to obey Christ. He is going to exalt Christ in what he says.

There should be no question about that because the preeminent love of his heart is Christ. Then that is what he want to speak about.

If you have to kind of sift through the rubble to a bunch of other stuff to hear, to find two minutes of Christ in four sermons, you don't have to figure everything out. Just say, "I am going someplace else." You don't have to figure it out. You don't have to analyze whether the man is a Christian or not. You just go by what he speaks on and evaluate him on that. This isn't difficult.

The apostle Paul said—I love this verse—"We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake."⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:5.

We don't preach ourselves. We preach Christ as Lord.

Do you know what? Do you want to go? I invite you to examine our pastor John MacArthur by that criteria. Examine Phil Johnson by that criteria and see whether that is not true of them. What is in a man's heart will come out when he is given a chance to speak. And if he wants to talk about earthly social issues, if he wants to talk just about setting up dialog with people who don't even believe in Christ and that is what he talks about when he is given the pulpit, talks about politics... Look. I am sorry, but he is not a man of Christ no matter what else he might say about it. He is not a man of Christ. Don't follow men like that, beloved. And if it is hard to find them, then just look all the more. We don't follow men who have earthly priorities and who put themselves at the center of their preaching.

And so if a man puts himself rather than Christ on display, he is not a good pastor. You can turn away from him without fearing the discipline or judgment of God. Say, "God, I just..." And you approach it before the Lord and say, "You know, Lord, I just want somebody who talks about Christ to me. That is all I want. I am really a simple minded believer here, Lord. Give me a pastor who shows me Christ."

That reminds me of the very first time that I had to preach was at a rescue mission in downtown Chicago, probably back in October of 1992 or thereabouts. And when I stepped into the pulpit, it was my first time in stepping into the pulpit and, you know, you

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:5.

are just preaching to people who are drunks and drug addicts and all of that and, you know, people who really need Christ. But somebody, sometime in the distant past this was a long established rescue mission. Somebody in the pulpit put a plate in the pulpit quoting John 12:21 simply saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”⁵

It was the men who went to Andrew and they said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”⁶ Actually they were talking to Philip in John 12:21 and whoever put that plate there got it. They understood.

“Just show us Christ. That is what we want. That is why we are gathered here. That is the idea. He must be a man of Christ.”

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus,”⁷ not you.

And that never left my consciousness having seen that.

Well, the second characteristic of a good pastor is that he needs to be, secondly, he needs to be a man of the canon. He needs to be a man of the canon—C A N O N—not C A N N O N. I have to clarify that on a day where we are honoring the veterans, not the boom cannon, but the 66 books of the Bible canon. That gives a different boom as the power of God is unleashed through the understanding of this Word.

Go back to John 21 if you even left there. I did, but go back to John 21 and in that passage that I read where Jesus establishes Peter’s love for Christ and restores him to ministry, notice the commands that he gives him.

At the end of verse 15 he says, “Tend my lambs.”⁸

Verse 16 at the end, “Shepherd my sheep.”⁹

Verse 17, “Tend my sheep.”¹⁰

And Jesus is not talking about literal sheep. He is not talking about feeding actual animals with wool on them. He is talking about his spiritual body. And so he is not talking about giving them physical food, but he is talking about giving them spiritual food. Peter, give them the spiritual food of my Word is what he is talking about there.

“Tend them, protect them and feed them with my Word so that they would be built up spiritually.” That is the idea.

⁵ John 12:21.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John 21:15.

⁹ John 21:16.

¹⁰ John 21:17.

A good pastor understands that his central responsibility is to feed you the Word of God because it is the Word that sanctifies you. It is the Word that equips you.

Turn back to 2 Timothy, if you would, 2 Timothy chapter three beginning in verse 16, a familiar passage. But notice the focus here.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.¹¹

Now sometimes we stop there, but just go right through to chapter four verse one. There were no chapter breaks in the original manuscripts.

Having talked about the preeminence of the Word there and the power and the sufficiency of Scripture, Paul commissions Timothy and says:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.¹²

He is saying, “Timothy, when you go to pastor these people, preach the Word to them. Sometimes they are going to need rebuke. They are going to be needed to be corrected from their wayward ways. Sometimes they are going to need encouragement. They are going to need instruction in doctrine. Exhort them to follow Christ and all the while be patient as you do so. Do this with great patience as you minister the Word to them.”

Paul was laying forth the power of Scripture and the importance of communicating it so that the people would be built up.

Earlier in the book of 2 Timothy if you go back to chapter two verse 15 he lays this charge on Timothy. He says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”¹³

It is about the Word. It is about the truth. It is about proclaiming the truth, because if a pastor proclaims to you the truth, gives you the understanding of the truth, then you are going to be built up so that you are equipped to do the work that God has placed into your life, what he has created you to do. A pastor who teaches you the Word is going to enable you to be more effective to the glory of Christ in the providential circumstances that the Lord has given to you. That is the kind of man that you want.

¹¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

¹² 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

¹³ 2 Timothy 2:15.

Now, look. It is not the flashiest thing to do. You know, there is a reason why people flock after those who promise them health and prosperity and those who are funny and all of that. You walk out and, “Yeah, that was good.”

You know what? That stuff is meaningless when your kids start to stray away. That stuff is meaningless when the doctor tells you it is cancer. That stuff is meaningless when the trials of life hit and you are reaching out and you have nothing to lay hold of because all of the sugary cotton candy preaching just dissolves in your fingers and there is nothing to lay hold of.

That is why I am so encouraged that you here in GraceLife are so faithful to come to Grace Church and receive the teaching of the Word of God. I know it is going to sustain you when the trials come and hit you like a full force hurricane. This time of receiving instruction in God’s Word, beloved, is not in vain. And when I say “this time” I don’t mean just this hour, but your ongoing commitment to receive the Word of God.

So he has to be a man of the canon, a man who leads you into the Word of God. You should be able when after a man has preached to you, you should be able to go back to that passage on your own and say, “Oh, I see how this fits together. I understand why he said this. I see it for myself in Scripture.”

No secret messages, no hidden meanings, no pastor’s telling you, “Well, God told me this,” and you don’t have any independent way to verify that. You can walk away from those kinds of men. It simplifies things greatly.

Now, the challenge, however, of determining whether a pastor is a man of the canon is more subtle than asking whether he refers to the Bible, whether he tosses in a Bible verse here and there because all of these hucksters—and that is what they are, they are hucksters—they understand that they have to somehow use the Bible to give them some measure of legitimacy or otherwise you are not going to be suckered into what they want you to do.

And so lots of men will throw in a Bible verse. But here are some things to look for to see if this man truly want to teach you the counsel of God revealed in the Bible. And these are some things that I mentioned in my message on how to recognize false teachers. Here are six questions to ask as you try to determine whether this man is a man of the canon or not, because it is not just about quoting the Bible. It is about teaching the doctrine of the Bible to lead you into a true knowledge of God and to a true knowledge of Christ.

First of all, when does this pastor teach you about the holiness and wrath of God? That is not a popular topic. A man who doesn’t truly love Christ, a man who is not a man of the canon doesn’t want to go there, because he realizes that people don’t want to hear that. And so he won’t preach that which will drive away the people who are just gathered around for other motives. When does he teach you about the holiness and wrath of God?

Secondly, when does this pastor teach you about eternal judgment and hell? Where is that theme in the overall preaching. I am not talking about just one message. I am talking about the theme of a man's preaching over time. What is his ministry over time like? When does he teach you on these things? When does he allude to these things? When does he warn sinners that eternal hell waits them if they don't repent?

Thirdly, when does he teach you about sin and repentance?

Fourthly, when does he tell you that justification is by faith alone, not by any works that you could do?

Fifthly, when does he teach you about the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that Christ died in the place of sinners and he alone bore the wrath of God in his body on the cross in order that the punishment of sin would be poured out on him so that forgiveness could be extended to sinners? When does he teach you on that, that the wrath of God was turned away at the cross?

Finally, there is lots of other things that we could say, but when does this pastor teach you about your own responsibility to follow Christ and grow in righteousness? Not simply always comfort you and make you feel good, but when does he lay forth the requirements of holiness and righteousness and call you to greater Christian living, greater holiness, greater sanctification as your responsibility as a follower of Christ?

When does he talk about those things?

And here is the thing, beloved. I am going back to what I opened up with. The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. If a pastor truly believes those issues, he will speak on them, not to keep his job, but because his heart convictions will compel him to do so. If you understand, if you have any sense at all that you are a dying man speaking to dying men and that the danger of deception and self delusion is so great and you realize that people are in spiritual danger, you are going to warn them out of the compulsion of your own heart if you believe these things, compulsion to be faithful to Christ, compulsion because you see it in the Word and compulsion because of the love and compassion that you have on people that you do not want to go to hell. This isn't difficult. This isn't complicated.

These are the themes of the canon. This is what the Bible teaches and, beloved, when men like Joel Osteen are silent on these issues, their silence is deafening. That is shouting volumes when a pastor says, "Well, I am not called to preach on wrath and repentance and those kinds of things. Mine is one of encouragement. Matthew 23, "Woe on you," woe, woe on men like that who would take a platform and hide the truth of God. It is because they don't believe it that they don't speak on it.

Don't give men the benefit of the doubt and say, "Well, I am sure he believes it. He just doesn't talk about it."

No, if he believes it, believe me, he will talk about it because he will be so overwhelmed by the urgency of it that he won't want to talk about anything else. He will understand that the thing for him to do is not to promise you your best life now, but to call you to think beyond this life either to the glories of heaven or the awfulness of the destruction in hell and to have you think spiritually about life and the ultimate appointment that you have by appearing before a holy God in judgment.

If he believes that, trust me, he will talk about it. And if he doesn't talk about it, it is just one step of logic backwards to say he doesn't believe that. And if he doesn't believe it, he is not a man of the canon. That is the point.

All he is doing is leading people down a broad road that leads to destruction. So, beloved, you, right to left and in the middle, you have to be smart enough. You have to be smart enough to look beyond a guy who makes you laugh, who makes you feel good, who always talks about the love of God in some general way, but never impresses upon you the holiness of God and your obligation to respond to him.

If a guy doesn't leave you with that impression week after week after week, run. Get away from him just as quickly as you can. And find a man who is a man of Christ and a man of the canon.

Now there is a third way that you can recognize a good pastor still in John 21 here. He needs to be a man of the Church. He needs to be a man of the Church. And the message that our own pastor preached at Resolved in 2009 is the full explanation of this. I am just going to touch on it briefly.

He needs to be a man of the Church by which I mean he understands that his primary responsibility is to feed and minister to the flock of Christ. That is his preeminent priority. He is not called to the world. He is called to the Church. That is the role of the pastor, the unique role of the pastor.

Notice in John 21 verses 15 to 17 that those ending quotes from Jesus tend—in verse 15, John 21 verse 15—“Tend my lambs.”¹⁴

My lambs. Who do I tend? Who do I go after? Who do I minister to? Who do I protect and guard? My lambs.

Verse 16. “Shepherd my sheep.”¹⁵

Verse 17. “Tend my sheep.”¹⁶

¹⁴ John 21:15.

¹⁵ John 21:16.

¹⁶ John 21:17.

As Jesus commissioned Peter to his apostolic ministry the focus was on equipping the saints. The pastor is not called primarily to the community. His first priority is the Church. It is the flock of Christ. He is an under shepherd of Christ to the flock of Christ.

The passage that Travis read earlier in Ephesians four, Ephesians four could not be any more clear about this. Ephesians four verses 11 and 12, “[Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.”¹⁷

Question. Why did he give pastors and teachers? What was the purpose of establishing pastors? What was the purpose of telling Peter, shepherd my sheep, tend my flock? Why did he do that?

Verse 12.

He gave them, verse 12, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”¹⁸

That is the focus of a pastor teacher. It is not that he is indifferent to evangelism in his own personal life, but he realizes that his primary ministry responsibility is to build up the Church.

The pastor’s job is not trying to redeem the culture, as Travis said last week, to try to become like the culture. That is baloney. That is just baloney from people who have never understood the primary responsibility of being an under shepherd and one who cares for the flock of Christ.

He is not trying to redeem the culture. He is not trying to attract seekers who don’t even believe in Christ into the Church. A pastor has to understand that his responsibility is to build up the flock. He seeks to protect believers and increase their sanctification.

If you are in Ephesians chapter four verse 20... actually let’s go to verse 16. I have to skip over a little bit of stuff here, but in verse 12 he said that he gave pastors and teachers to the building up of the body of Christ.

And look at verse 16. He said, verse 15, “[as you speak] truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies...”¹⁹ causes to grow the body, the body of Christ “for the building up of itself in love.”²⁰

The focus here is on the body of Christ, building up the body of Christ.

¹⁷ Ephesians 4:11.

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:12.

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:15-16.

²⁰ Ephesians 4:16.

Now what does that mean? Well, in verses 17 to 19 he separates what we used to be from the way the Gentiles formerly unsaved people. But now in verse 20 look at this.

A man of the Church, he has got to be a man of the Church. What does that mean? He builds up the Church. What does that mean? He promotes their sanctification and their growth in holiness?

Verse 20. Remember, this is all flowing out of the importance of building up the body of Christ which is the pastor's primary responsibility.

Verse 20.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, [in the way of the Gentiles] if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that [here is what the pastor's teaching is supposed to promote] you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.²¹

Righteousness and holiness, that is what his teaching should be promoting in your life. And that is his responsibility to promote the righteousness and holiness of those who are in the Church. That is what he gives his life to. That is what he aims his teaching at.

And so as soon as you hear a pastor say, "Oh, I want to reach the seekers or I want to reach the community," and that sounds really good and it sounds really spiritual and all of that stuff. Understand this. When a pastor speaks like that, red lights and alarm bells should go on in your mind because you should be asking yourself, "Where does he express and understanding that he has a responsibility, first of all, to build put the body of Christ. And inevitably I have seen this so many times and I am sure you have, too.

This is a predictable pattern in those who adopt a seeker philosophy of the Church. They push the Bible out of the pulpit and the Christians who are there quickly get frustrated because no one is feeding them the Word of God. There is a reason why that frustration happens. It is because the pastor is not pursuing the right priority.

And so the saints' languish while we minister to people, supposedly, while they try to attract people into the walls of the Church who really don't have a desire for the Word of God that builds people up and calls them to Christ.

A pastor should understand that his primary responsibility is to build you up. If he is concerned about the community, God bless him. But he shouldn't be a pastor because

²¹ Ephesians 4:20-24.

the truth is that if a pastor feeds you, if he feeds the flock, if he takes care of his responsibility to feed the flock, outreach will happen as a natural result of transformed lives who are filled with the joy of Christ. That is the way it works.

Just a couple of references here that I will just read to you, Acts 20 verse 28. I alluded to it earlier without quoting it, I think. Acts 20 verse 28, Paul speaking to the elders at Ephesus said, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock.”²² Be on guard for the flock. “Among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”²³

1 Peter chapter five, 1 Peter five verses one through three. Peter says:

I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.²⁴

To the flock.

Now, look. It is not that the pastor should be indifferent or cold in evangelism. That is not what I am saying. I am talking about what his primary responsibility is as a pastor and how that drives what he does as he leads a church.

That is the idea. He needs to be a man of the Church. He needs to be devoted to the care, the love, the building up of the Church of Christ. That is what makes his heart beat is a love for the Church.

Finally, point number four, he needs to be a man of character. And I will just... write down this passage, Titus one verses five through nine, the character requirements of an elder. I want to read a few verses out of 1 Timothy three as well. And I will just read one passage for the sake of time.

1 Timothy three. He needs to be a man of character, verse three.

“If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”²⁵

Verse two. “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...”²⁶ and on it goes.

²² Acts 20:28.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 1 Peter 5:1-3.

²⁵ 1 Timothy 3:1.

²⁶ 1 Timothy 3:2.

He needs to, verse four, “manage his own household well.”

Look at this, verse five.

“But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?”²⁷

It’s right there in the character requirements that the care of the Church of God is what his primary responsibility is. Take care of the Church. Be a man of sound doctrine. Be a man of character, of biblical, holy character, prudent, respectable, gentle, peaceable. You could put the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 alongside that and see what he is talking about. But even as the Bible lays out the character of the pastor, it emphasizes his priorities in the Church and in teaching.

So he is a man of Christ. He is a man of the canon. He is a man of the Church. And he is a man of character and we are going over the character things too briefly here.

Here is what I want to say. Understand that a man that God has truly called to ministry is going to manifest all four of these characteristics. It is not that you get two out of four, three out of four right and the other one doesn’t matter. Which one would you cast aside? That he doesn’t love Christ, but the other three are ok?

No, that doesn’t work.

You know he is not devoted to the Bible... that doesn’t work.

He is not devoted to the Church. That doesn’t work.

Well, maybe his teaching is really good and, you know, he is really reformed, but, you know, I know his character stinks. I know that you can’t put him in front of children because you don’t know what is going to come out of his mouth at any given time.

No. No. All four or zero. This isn’t pass fail. This isn’t graded on a curve. All four of these priorities should be a dominant direction of the man’s life. No pastor is perfect, but the dominant direction of his life and what you see flowing out of his teaching, this is what you look for. It is a high calling of which no man is worthy on his own. It must be a work of God in his life.

What does this mean for you in closing as I read 2 Peter 3:17 and 18? What does this mean for you? How do you take this and apply it? Discernment and your own pursuit of righteousness.

The end of 2 Peter chapter three.

²⁷ 1 Timothy 3:5.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but [by contrast] grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.²⁸

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the clarity of your Word and we thank you for your faithfulness to your Church to raise up men who manifest these characteristics. We ask you to support them, not just in our church, Father, but men like this throughout all of the world who are faithfully trying to minister on behalf of Christ. Father, we would embrace all of those in this prayer and ask you to gather them up and bless them and direct them. Father, for these that are here, take these words. Seal them in their heart. Lead them to shepherds that would manifest these characteristics. And as they go, Father, may these words of promise from you be ringing in their minds.

The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.²⁹

Amen.

²⁸ 2 Peter 3:17-18.

²⁹ Numbers 6:24-26.