

May 10, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Transition
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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THE PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CONGREGATION

On March 21 this year, the elders and deacons met in a somewhat modified version of our annual leadership retreat. The theme of the retreat was "Transition." We began to think earnestly about the inevitable. That I am aging is undeniable. That the aging process leads to retirement is also undeniable. That we should develop a reasonable and responsible plan to transition from me to a new senior pastor for the church is sensible.

To that end, we have mapped out a plan which we hope will work for the most part. I plan to retire at the very latest at age 70. That is three-and-one-half years from now. Our desire is to have the new pastor on staff being groomed for at least two years to transition into the senior pastor position. That gives us about a year-and-one-half at the most to find who God desires to place in this position. Six months can easily be consumed in the process of considering one candidate from initial contact, through the vetting process to the point of elimination (in a good sense). As you can tell, we need to be busy about this matter.

Our plan is to take the Adult Bible Fellowship time each Sunday in May and June to unfold the intended process step by step to the congregation. Because of Covid-19, the second quarter classes all had to be rescheduled. In light of that rescheduling, the leadership decided to spend the ABF time explaining the goal, the process for achieving the goal, and especially the importance of seeking and staying within God's will in the process.

The original plan was for me to lead a Q&A session during ABF last week. Obviously that didn't happen. Nor did it happen this week. The second and third sessions were to be explanations of the

pastor's responsibility to the congregation and the congregation's responsibility to the pastor. Because of the truncated ABF schedule, we will move the explanations of responsibilities to two Sunday evening sermons, one tonight and one on May 24. Then we will host the Q&A during the ABF hour on May 24. Many questions about procedures and plans will be addressed and hopefully answered during that time.

In laying groundwork for this major undertaking, we will consider principles the Bible teaches about what the pastor should be to the congregation and what the congregation should be to the pastor. Several years ago, Pat and I were visiting in a church. They were without a pastor. They asked me to teach the adult Sunday School class and I thought it would be expedient to teach on this topic. After the class, the chairman of the deacons came to me with somber spirit and said, "Oh boy, we should have heard that weeks ago. We just voted on a new pastor last week." As it turns out the new pastor lasted a total of three months and he was gone. The deacon was right.

We can never go wrong by laying the groundwork of what we are looking for in a new pastor and what we should be to the new pastor according to the instruction the Owner and Builder of the Church has given to us. We will consider in this sermon, the pastor's responsibility to the congregation.

The Pastor's character.

God requires that a pastor guard himself. Paul instructed the elders in Ephesus to, *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28).*

According to this instruction, the pastor must pay attention to himself first. *Pay careful attention to yourselves.* To pay attention is to fix your mind on the object. It is the kind of very close attention that a ship's captain will exercise as he attempts to bring the ship into port. One distraction, one careless move, and he could do a lot of damage. The idea here is paying close attention to your own spiritual condition and need first. The pastor must always remember that he is a leader. Granted this causes stress, but that doesn't change reality.

All of that means that the pastor is not just one of the guys, doesn't just fit in, but is in some ways "odd." This is the thing I struggle with most in ministry. Some of you have heard me say, "The thing I am looking forward to in retirement is just being Dave." My flesh has always longed for "normalcy." That is not God's design for the pastor.

Furthermore, the pastor must pay careful attention *to all the flock*. He should pay the same kind of careful attention to sheep God has placed in his care. He must observe, watch, be perceptive and discerning. He should always be watching carefully to see what the flock needs to conform them to the standard of Christ the Chief Shepherd and be diligent to supply it.

The under-shepherd will be more likely to do that when he realizes that he is the pastor by God's appointment. He is to pay attention to the flock *in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer*. The pastor should never think that being the shepherd of Community Baptist Church was his idea. You don't want a pastor who thinks this is his church, his work, and the people are simply to be used to accomplish his goals. Our goal is to uncover, discover, WHO the Holy Spirit is appointing as the overseer of Christ's flock. Which explains why we will emphasize much prayer over the next months.

Also, we see in this text that the pastor must understand his responsibility which is *to care for the church of God*. The verb used for care is *poimaino* which means to shepherd. To shepherd is to feed the sheep spiritual food, teaching the Bible. It is protecting the sheep from bad food. It is protecting the sheep from wolves (false teachers). It is protecting the sheep from spiritual thieves who would rob them of their confidence and joy in Christ. To shepherd is to heal the sheep's wounds. And it also involves training the sheep how to avoid getting the wounds in the first place. To be the shepherd of the sheep is to be out in front leading the sheep,

This is a serious responsibility because the pastor is to shepherd God's assembly (*ekklesia*). The Greek word for church is the well-known word that comes from the word that means to call. The church is comprised of those whom God has called out of the world to Himself. People who are part of an assembly only because the pastor is such a wonderful and nice guy may very well not even be God's

sheep. This flock, this herd, this assembly is God's possession and nothing will change that.

The pastor must understand the value of the flock. It is the assembly *which God obtained with his own blood*. Though God created all people, He buys His flock out of the slaughter house of sin. God paid the infinite price for the flock – His blood. The pastor must understand that he is not dealing with just ordinary people. He must highly value the Shepherd's sheep. He must be highly suspicious of the wolves who dress up like sheep in order to scatter or wound the sheep God purchased.

Another characteristic of the pastor is that he must keep a clear conscience regarding the faith. Paul instructed Timothy to *hold on to faith and a good conscience (1 Timothy 1:19)*. The term faith in this statement refers to the Scriptures. Faith is the corpus of truth, what we call the Bible. We are privileged to have and to hold on to them. We are to hold on to the Bible as if it is a precious possession. It is. The pastor must hold tightly as one would tie himself tightly to an object. Like tying a boat to the mooring. The verb (hold) form here is a present active participle which describes a regular practice, a characteristic of life.

Not only must the pastor hold on tightly to the Scripture, but he must keep his conscience "good." To occupy the office of pastor but have a low view of Scripture is a hypocrisy that dulls the conscience. The pastor, first of all, must have a very sensitive conscience toward: 1) Anything that is in conflict with Scripture, and 2) Anything that is in conformity with Scripture. In this way, he will be able to lead the people into that which will help them be more like Christ, and away from that which will deter them from being like Christ and being more like their sinful flesh.

Another characteristic of the pastor is that he must set the example. Christ has given the pastor as a spiritual gift to His body. *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you (1 Timothy 4:14)*. It was obvious that Christ had given Timothy to the church as the gift of pastor/teacher. Elders recognized it and affirmed it publicly. Every pastor/teacher needs to be God-called and God-equipped for the task. If he is, it will be obvious. If he is not God-called and God-equipped, that too will be obvious.

Continuing to look at Paul's instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4, we learn from verses fifteen and sixteen that the pastor must be devoted to good things. *Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:15-16).* These things refer to the instruction of 4:6-14. That would include, putting truth to the people (v.6), exercise toward godliness more than physical (v.8), commanding and teaching (v.11), being a good example (v.12), and reading the Scripture publicly (v.13).

In order to pull off all that responsibility, the pastor needs to be devoted. Devotion requires self-disciplined. That discipline applies to his guarding his character and his teaching. It is a reminder that a good example is priceless and even carries eternal ramifications.

The pastor's character also should reveal that he values his stewardship. What is that? Paul explained it by saying that God has deposited His Word with the pastor. *Guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge" (1 Timothy 6:20).* The deposit that God has entrusted to the pastor is the truth of God's Word, the commandment, Paul referred to in 6:14: *We are "to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:14).*

A deposit, in any sense of the word, is committed to us for safe keeping or for wise management. This is the same thing as the stewardship of the gospel that God commits to the pastor. He is a steward, a manager of God's mysteries which God has committed to him (1 Corinthians 4:1). As such, it is required that he be found faithful in how he handles God's possession (1 Corinthians 4:2).

The deposit of God's truth is the opposite of, stands in contrast to *so called knowledge*. There is a corpus of knowledge that the unregenerate but religious world believes is superior. These are the conclusions of the "experts." Often these expert opinions that deal with experiences of life, good feelings, a sense of self-esteem and accomplishment appear to be very helpful. But in the end the advice, recommendations still leave the needy person without the peace of God. In reality, that so-called knowledge is just irreverent babble, so

much chatter that ignores God's character and God's wisdom. As a result, it is contradictory, changing every time a new book comes out.

A large part of the pastor guarding the deposit of Bible truth that God has committed to him is his rigid avoidance of this so-called knowledge. He avoids the negative by focusing on the positive. The idle mind is still the devil's playground. Conversely, if the pastor gives himself wholly to knowing God's truth, he will generally have an accurate rebuttal of error.

And the pastor must be disciplined to follow the right pattern. Paul instructed the pastor, *Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:13).* Always be suspect of the pastor who thinks he has come up with new and better way from Scripture to help God's people. Solomon warned us that there is nothing new under the sun. So, too, new ideas hatched in human brains might create new technology, but does nothing to enhance human nature. Human wisdom comes with no guarantees. In contrast is the *pattern of sound words*. This pattern of sound words is the same as "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:1). To value the Bible enough to teach it is to show the love of Christ to the people. Human wisdom is so in conflict with that idea because it thinks love makes people feel good about themselves.

Along those same lines, we read that the pastor must avoid foolish controversies. *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels (2 Timothy 2:23-25).* The term controversies in this verse refer to disagreements that come from searching out endless possibilities. It is a reminder that the preacher who discovers a brand new way or truth or idea has embraced his own speculation. These are called foolish and ignorant (like an untrained child). When a pastor focuses on fringe "truths" or "ideas," he will probably stir up a quarrel. God's preferred characteristic of the assembly is "peace" not quarrels. In fact, the Greek word found here (*maxei*) originally referred to outright physical battles.

The Pastor's Work.

A most obvious characteristics of the pastor's work is that he must deal with people. Paul's instruction to leaders in the church at

Thessalonica was, *We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all (1 Thessalonians 5:14)*. In one short sentence of instruction, we find four different aspects of the pastor's work.

First, he must admonish lazy people. Actually the word for idle has a pretty broad application. It refers to people who are undisciplined, impulsive, or irregular. This is someone who sticks his or her nose in other people's business because they are not busy or productive themselves. The pastor needs to rebuke and instruct such people, reminding them of God's rules.

Second, he must encourage fainthearted people. Fainthearted people are discouraged people. The Greek word literally means "little souled." It pictures the person who faces difficulties that have caused them to lose hope. The pastor is supposed to encourage and cheer up such people.

The third aspect of work goes well with the second aspect. The pastor needs to help the weak people. Weak could apply to many different areas of life. There will be people in the church who are weak spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally. To help them is to hold on to them.

Fourth, while the pastor is admonishing the undisciplined, encouraging the downcast, and holding on to the weak, he must do it while being patient with all. My desire is always to be like Moses and not John the Beloved (Son of Thunder). It doesn't always work out that way, or even seldom does. The pastor who is not patient needs to learn patience, which is a very hard series of lessons. One time I stopped at a gas station to get a Coke. I put my money in the machine, pushed the button, and nothing happened. So I proceeded to do what almost anyone would do, I began beating on the machine. About then the owner came out, calmly put a key in the door, opened the machine and gave me a Coke. Then he said, "Machines, they don't understand beatings. Now people, they understand beatings, but machines don't."

A fifth characteristic of the pastor's work is found in 1 Timothy 5:20 where we learn that he will at some point have to rebuke people who sin. *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear (1 Timothy 5:20)*. The problem that he will need to address is persistent sin. To be accurate,

the sinner should have been approached about the sin on more than one occasion. (This is the church discipline described in Matthew 18.) Then, when it becomes obvious that there has been no repentance, there should be rebuke. To rebuke involves gathering evidence, proving guilt, censuring or reproving. The censure and revealing of evidence is to be done before all with the goal to frighten others into not sinning. Really! We don't do that very often. It sounds a lot like something the Puritans would do. The pastor must not shy away from church discipline when it is necessary.

The pastor's work will consist of dealing with people, and it will also including dealing with the Word. He must read the Word publicly. Paul taught the pastor to, *Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching (1 Timothy 4:13)*. This means that he will read the Bible in public, that he will teach the Bible in public, and that he will call people to stand alongside the Bible. That is the idea of exhortation. Exhortation is the application and convicting part of preaching.

In order to be able to accurately, effectively teach and exhort, the pastor must first learn how to cut the Word correctly. Again, Paul taught Timothy, *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:14-17)*. It takes discipline to handle the word of truth rightly. That is the idea behind "do your best." God desires to approve the way the pastor "cuts" the Bible, but it doesn't come naturally or easily. Cutting the Word takes practice. And if the pastor will focus on cutting the Word correctly, it will certainly help him avoid babble.

The pastor must also be engaged in training in good doctrine. This is a present tense idea, an ongoing practice. *If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed (1 Timothy 4:6)*. In our setting, training begins in college and seminary. But it continues throughout life. A pastor needs to read and study, whether or not it is a natural desire. Training is good not just that the pastor can know what he is preaching is true, but because trained servants avoid foolishness. *Have nothing to do*

with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7).

One of the most expected (in my opinion) traits of the pastor's work is the preaching of the Word. To me, one of the great statements in the Bible about the pastor's work is, "*I 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, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).*" I have commented on this important text so many times, that I feel at liberty to move on and simply allow it to speak what it speaks.

The pastor's attitude in work is also important. He is to willingly take oversight but with the heart of a servant. Peter exhorts the elders to *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly (1 Peter 5:2).* The word translated oversight (*episkopos*) gives us the English word Episcopal, which is more than a denomination but a form of church government. The Greek word means to look after diligently, and then to lead. Though God calls and God constrains us, we do this thing willingly. In fact, we ought to be concerned about the pastor who is concerned about "making enough money" in ministry. We will talk about the other side of that coin in a couple of weeks.

The pastor's work also involves him setting an example. He must be careful to be *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).* That means he should not act like a tyrant. Rather, his work must look more like he is more of a teacher (*example*) than a master.

The pastor's authority for doing his work is a very important matter. Who gives him the right to be the leader, the shepherd, the teacher, the admonisher and rebuker? It is not a denomination or licensing board. The pastor has authority from God and must act like it. *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you (Titus 2:15).* Again, this does not permit the pastor to act like a tyrant. However, at the same time, he must not forget that God put him in this position and gave this responsibility. It is a fine line to walk.

As the authority, the pastor must "charge" people. *Charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith (1 Timothy 1:3-4).* To charge is to command or give very direct, pointed instruction. False teaching, distracting speculations must be addressed. To do this part of the work, the pastor must be confident AND courageous.

The pastor's authority for leading and teaching is the Bible. We end with an appeal, as I have often appealed, to the great statement about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).* The pastor must not act authoritatively on his own. His authority is assigned to him by God. Therefore, he must be fully convinced about the authority of Scripture to accomplish the work of God.

The pastor's responsibility to the people of the assembly is clearly mapped out in Scripture. His character is defined. His work is defined. The divine job description leaves little doubt as to what the Founder and Builder of the Church expects.