

Trinity Presbyterian Core Group

Lesson 3 – Pastors: How has God organized His Church to guide us and care for us?

Intro

- We discussed last week the marks of a true church. As the Belgic Confession states:
The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin.
- This week we will discuss the role of a pastor in feeding, teaching, guiding and caring for God's sheep.

Pastors (Teaching Elders)

- Though we place both elders and pastors in the same category of "elder" there is a reason that the two offices ought to be distinguished.
- Here is the primary place that we see a distinction in the kind of elders that were instituted by God (what we call ruling and teaching elders)

1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

- Paul explained more of what the role of a teaching elder looks like when he exhorted Timothy in his pastoral duties:

1Tim 4:13-16

¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- And Paul emphasized how important this work in his charge to Timothy as a pastor:

2 Tim 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

- So while our culture often thinks that they need the church to provide just about everything else besides hearing from God through the Word, there is NOTHING that supersedes hearing from God in the life of the church. There are other very crucial things, to be sure, but none of them eclipses the need to hear God as his Word is preached.
- Paul demonstrated how vital the work of preaching and teaching is to the life and well-being of the church:

Eph 4:11-16

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

- What is so important about the design God has established for the office of pastor? We see here that it is through the preaching/teaching of the Word in the hands of those that God has gifted and called to do so, results in the entire body being built up and equipped so that they can serve one another.
- However, it is crucial that this passage be interpreted (as well as translated!) properly in regard to what these pastors and teachers are charged to do.
- The verse in question is **4:12**, and the NIV follows the recent fad of putting the responsibility for the ministry of the Word on the lay people rather than on the Pastors.

Ephesians 4:12 (NIV)

...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

- In this line of thinking, it is the pastor's job to get the lay people to do the work of the ministry. But the grammar and especially the context show that the ministry described

here is done by the pastors for the perfecting and maturing of the *saints*; it is NOT to equip *the saints* to do the “real” ministry of the church.¹

- The KJV, however, translates **4:12** properly, showing three distinct reasons that God calls and gifts pastors for their sheep:

Ephesians 4:12 (KJV)

(1) For the perfecting of the saints, (2) for the work of the ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ...

- This was the traditional interpretation of this passage almost uniformly until, in late 19th century liberal circles, more democratic and individualistic versions of Christianity began to be touted.²
- Thus, pastors are called and gifted to be shepherds to the sheep. But if everyone is a shepherd, where/who are the sheep? As Paul explains, while everyone is called to serve, not all are called to do the same things, or serve in the same ways.

Rom 12:4-6

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

- This may sound like hair-splitting, but it really does reorient our minds from thinking that the ministry of the church is the layperson’s job, to realizing that God has sent His shepherds to the laypeople so that *they* can be fed, ministered to, and edified.
- And make no mistake, the lay people/church members are called to a great deal of service and proclamation of the gospel! But it is the pastor’s role to feed you and build you up for that end; it is NOT the pastor’s role to teach you to feed yourself.
- Thus, we all are called to serve and exhort each other in the Gospel, but that role does not supersede the work of the Pastors in feeding the flock so that they can serve in the power of Christ.

¹ T. David Gordon, “Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37/1 (March 1994) 69-78; Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 4:12; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 253-255. Lincoln particularly notes how the recent emphasis on democratic views of the church has influenced the interpretation of many commentators.

² See Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: an Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 547, n. 1, for a list of early church fathers who taught this view; see also; John Owen, “A Discourse on Spiritual Gifts”, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), 496-97; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 164.

- Though many today consign the pastor to something of a CEO, this is not the Scriptural distinctive: he is set apart from the Ruling Elder not in authority, but in his calling to preach and teach the Word.

Michael Horton

Do we really believe, as the apostles and the reformers did, that the church is the *creatura verbi*—"creation of the Word"? That faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ as it is proclaimed by those who are sent? That the heart of sanctification is the renewing of the mind by the Word?

Pastors would never tell their congregations to outsource their discipleship to others: to pay someone else to pray, read the Bible, and witness for them. Why do some think that it's fine for them to do this, especially when—unlike their parishioners—pastors are called to devote their full time to this work?

The tragedy is that pastors are often overwhelmed even by important things that are nevertheless subordinate to their ministry of the Word and the sacraments. Too often, elders are taken from the ranks of leaders in business, industry, and other professions, even if they lack the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. Not surprisingly, the church is run like a corporation, with the pastor as the CEO. Or in other contexts, the pastor is the young and independent entrepreneur—more like Mark Zuckerberg than St. Timothy. He has to keep reinventing himself and his ministry and this requires enormous energy. But what really matters?

Amid these obvious extremes there are the faithful pastors who are wearied by parts of their job description that are in fact mentioned in Scripture. They may have godly elders who rule well and generous deacons who look out for the temporal needs of the sheep. Yet even with such blessings it's difficult to avoid the constant interruptions.

What are those "other things" that have pastors so busy? Are those other things as explicitly mentioned in the job description laid out by Christ and his apostles? Or are we—even in "gospel-centered" and "Bible-believing" circles—coming to recast the office in terms more aligned to the managerial, entrepreneurial, or therapeutic styles of leadership that our culture prizes? A minister friend recently quipped, "The most embarrassing question you can ask a group of pastors in our circles today is, 'What's the latest book you've read?'"

Last week, after explaining my symptoms, I asked my doctor about a prescription that I saw advertised. The ad sold me. Sounded like my symptoms and promised to solve them (with the appropriate qualifications at the tail end). My doctor said he had prescribed that very medication many times, but after reading a ground-breaking report he was taking all of his patients off of it. I'm glad *he* keeps reading.

Imagine your pastor exhorting the congregation next week to stop coming to church and simply visit websites to become "self-feeders"? Well, perhaps that's a bad illustration, since it's actually happening today...

To follow the Good Shepherd as his emissaries is to feed his sheep. It's a calling not to be taken up lightly. If we're going to take it up, we need to prepare for it. And then we need to keep ourselves in his Word and in whatever resources that can help us deepen our own wisdom rather than outsource it to others. Great numbers of pastors out there are fulfilling this calling "in season and out of season" today. Nevertheless, there is a troubling proliferation of preachers who are not so much lazy as distracted by expectations—either their own or those of others—that turn the pastor's study into an office, building their own ministry rather than serving Christ's. Here, as always, we all need to be reminded that Christ is the only head of his church. We didn't write the job description and he knows best what his people—and we ourselves—need most.³

³ Michael Horton, "Outsourcing Our Job Description? A Plea to Fellow Ministers" <http://www.whitehorseinn.org>