

Introduction

“I obey the precepts of Christ who says 'examine the Scriptures' and 'seek and you will find.' Let me not hear with the Jews: 'you are wrong because you do not know Scriptures nor the power of God.' For if, according to the apostle Paul, Christ is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God,' and who does not know Scripture does not know the power or the wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

Introduction to the book of the prophet Isaiah, St. Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate,

The Priority and Centrality of Teaching

Pondering Jerome's poignant words, “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,” leads to a useful, clarifying truth. Among the varied responsibilities assigned by our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to his dear under-shepherds among God's flock¹, there is none more central or more vital to the care of souls, the current spiritual health and future glory of the body of Christ, and the continuity and propagation of the apostolic Christian faith than that of teaching. The Chief Shepherd, in his earthly ministry to Israel exemplified the insight into the problem of mankind and heart-felt drive to do something about it that shines a guiding light on the path of every under-shepherd:

And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34 NAS)

Jesus' compassion drove him to teach the Word. Our Savior saw feeding as a core duty of a caring shepherd and as such, teaching was the reflexive shepherding response to the dismal sight of a scattered, hungry, endangered and distressed flock.

Later, our glorified Jesus Christ pointedly, (John 21:14-19) even at the risk of personal offense (v17b), commanded, cajoled and exhorted Peter in his primary mission of feeding/teaching that was to radically alter and consume the rest of Peter's life, and even led ultimately to a particularly brutal death (vv18-19). In this passage Jesus transmits the urgency, priority and centrality of teaching when he urges Peter to, “be feeding my lambs,” “be shepherding my sheep,” and “be feeding my sheep.”²

Teaching as the means of feeding and the core activity of shepherding God's flock is the silver thread running through the Acts of the Apostles, under-girds the very existence and is itself the content and heart of the epistles, and reaches its apex in John's Revelation. “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*” (Rev 1:3 NAS)

A Word of Caution and Advice for Shepherds

It has been well said that, “*If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it with amazing accuracy!*” Many evangelical pastors and teachers enter into, obtain an expensive education for, and continue for many years in, what they think of as ministry without due consideration of its goal. This leads to poor choices in education, misdirection or indecision in ministry priority especially in crisis, failure to endure when obstacles to and frustrations with ministry are encountered, lack of self-control, fleshly conflict with others, and all too often, heartbreak, moral failure and/or ministry dropout.

Men enter and desire ministry for various reasons, including the desire to help or support people, a sense of calling, to please God, to be noticed and liked, to “win this town for Jesus,” to spread the

gospel, and a range of other motivations of varying quality and intensity.³

The reader is well advised, and will be blessed to ask of the Word itself what the goal of his teaching it ought and ought not to be. Only there is found certainty, safety and assurance of purpose and calling in the stated will of God.

The Goal of the Teaching Function of Shepherds

The Scriptures are clear on the goal of the teaching function of pastors, and when heeded, this goal functions as a wonderful directional compass for those considering a life of pastoring and teaching. It serves to redirect the course of beleaguered and dissipated shepherds, and it either blocks or corrects men considering entering into ministry with mixed or unclear motives. In a very helpful sense the goal of teaching defined by Scripture also functions as a litmus test for the astute believer who is looking for and evaluating teaching and teachers blessed by God. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus,

¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13 NAS)

In approaching this passage the interpreter will not be well served to freight its interpretation with cultural presuppositions and emphases, including a typical modern hierarchical or professionalized view of church structure or ministry expectations. Included in such presuppositions are the concept of a sole, senior pastor and associates and emphasizing “leadership” and programs, or even a group of co-pastor/elders who fulfill these functions.

A sensitive and accurate reading of the passage detects that the primary emphasis of Paul here is not on the pastors and teachers as gifts to the church.⁴ Instead, Paul's use of the phrase, “*for the equipping,*” emphasizes the intermediate purpose of the teaching, which is equipping, building up the body of Christ. Paul then shines light on the final glorious goal of the purpose with, “*until we all,*” attain to the unity of the faith, an accurate knowledge of the Son of God, the body becoming a “mature man,” reaching the stature of the fulness of Christ himself.⁵

In short, the gifting of pastors and teachers by God to the church is not an end in itself. They as gifts to the body from her glorified Head, are human means of expositing divine truths unto that much greater and more glorious end. That end is that all, including the pastors and teachers as part of the same body, attain to the very qualities and character of Christ himself. This truth by no means diminishes the vital importance and necessity of pastors and teachers. Instead it places in proper perspective the even greater teleological focus of their teaching: maturity of the whole body.

Just what does a “a mature man” mean? Of course it includes sanctification unto Christlike character and lifestyle (2 Peter 1:5-10, Titus 2), including the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This sanctification may be thought of as personal Biblical orthopraxy⁶. It must also incorporate the coordinated ministries by which the body of Christ cares for and nurtures itself, and includes all aspects of a life lived in worship and sacrifice (Romans 12:1). All these corporate habits and behaviors are aspects of church orthopraxy. They are whole-body sanctification (Eph 4:13).

True Christian Sanctification unto Christ Depends Absolutely on Revealed Truth

Genuine, Christ-like maturity in character and fruit-bearing can not exist, much less endure, in the

absence of maturity in knowledge of and fluency in the Scriptures. A facile and intimate familiarity with the doctrines contained therein is a deep and beloved gaze into the heart of the things of the triune God, his works, desires, and promises, and our duties and blessings from him. The Scriptures and a deep knowledge of them, under the illumination of the Spirit, are absolutely necessary to inflame, inform and induce conformity to the image of Christ as well as proper service to God (Romans 12:1-2).

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAS)

This is Biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy, inter-woven in their means and endpoint. The Christian faith is an inscripturated, revealed faith; both its divine source and its revealed content are alien and opaque to this world system. The natural man is inherently ignorant of its precious truths and bears animosity to his self-warped perception of it. Knowledge of that revelation is only arrived at by familiarity with those same Scriptures, by the design and intention of our good God. To paraphrase St. Jerome, ignorance of God and his revelation is the natural state of man as a result of ignorance of the Scriptures.

And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19 NAS)

John explains a chief purpose of the writings,

But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31 NAS)

Being of the Same Mind and Judgment

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10 NAS)

The faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) cannot rightly be referred to as “the faith” unless it is one body of truth, consistently and not variously comprehended by its adherents. The Corinthian church had a problem in that, not only were they divided as to their favorite super-pastor, they were seriously divided over doctrine and had apparently resolved the problem by deciding not to resolve it but just to listen to their favorite guy and ignore the others. Paul's hortatory appeal is not to lower their standards just to get along, but to raise the bar. Paul's desire was that each Corinthian was to comprehend divine truths, and come to one meeting of the minds on doctrine.

He urged one understanding of the one meaning of the one body of revelation given to them by the one Holy Spirit and culminating in an accurate portrait of and obedience to the one glorious Lord, Jesus Christ.

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: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Timothy 4:1-2 NAS)

Consider what Paul does *not* charge Timothy with as his apostolic associate. He does not tell him to just *preach*. Rather, he charges him with particular and specific force, to *preach the word*. There is one

coherent body of truth that is assumed by Paul to be repeatable, understandable/perspicuous to study, able to be articulated and not subject to endless debate and uncertainty. This concept of *the Word* as one body of truth is so clear that Paul charges him with the task on pain of loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ, the Bema (1 Corinthians 3).

Thus, the task and bounden duty of the pastor as teacher is comprised of two main actions. Firstly, to come to an accurate, comprehensive and faithful apprehension of that one faith once and for all delivered to the saints and now embodied in the Scriptures. Secondly, his task and duty is to then tell his charges what he sees so that they are brought to exactly that same apostolic faith. Any effort below that standard is *deficient* and any effort that departs from that standard is *defective*. Both would apparently be unacceptable to Paul.

The Desired Result of the Teaching Function of Shepherds

One aspect of teaching ministry that is a source of ongoing frustration and uncertainty for pastors is: *How do I know I've done it properly and sufficiently? How do I know we've arrived in a meaningful sense? How do I know to keep pressing forward?* It is a tangible blessing to know the desired and promised result of teaching done properly in service to those who have ears to hear.

First, Paul describes the intellectual, emotional and spiritual stability as well as new ability, sensitivity and willingness to exercise the discernment of truth and error. These are to arise out of the efforts of the pastors and teachers as a foundational platform for growth:

¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; (Ephesians 4:14 NAS)

Second, on the assumption that foundation is established, Paul paints a further final portrait for the Ephesians of what the mature body of Christ ought to be like:

¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, (Ephesians 4:15 NAS)

Away from Infancy and on to Maturity – The Goal is Making Teachers

It should be an objective and a plain expectation of the teacher that those he is responsible to teach are established as stable and mature in doctrine and sanctification. (Ephesians 4:14) There is to be a further sign of maturity: Where practicable and as the norm for maturing believers, and to the degree appropriate to ability, circumstance, gender and age, “*but speaking the truth in love*” (v15a), indicates that all ought to go on to be teachers (*speakers of the truth*).

In other words, the target of maturity for all Christians of *normal* capacity is to be teachers in *some* capacity. Consider these compelling words from Jesus himself:

A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. (Luke 6:40 NAS)

The author of Hebrews, frustrated with the infantile level of doctrinal and spiritual maturity, and lack of capability and usefulness of his readers issues this complaint to them:

¹¹ Concerning him [Christ] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and

you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (Hebrews 5:11-13 NAS)

He did not think that, considering the substantial passage of time while being exposed to the Scriptures and sound teaching, it was normal, usual, or healthy for his readers not to be teachers themselves. It is to be the normal course of events in a believer's life that he/she become one who passes on the truths of God's Word. It is abnormal and a failure to mature if a believer of normal capacities does not develop and exercise some capacity for knowing, transmitting and defending the truths of the faith. This does not mean that everyone will necessarily be a teacher in an official or pastoral capacity. But each one should be able to accurately transmit the faith as contained in the Word of God to others, as an apologist, evangelist, expositor, exhorter, and as a refuter of error and heresy.

People of normal capacity devote time to develop competency in and obtain training for a range of trades, specialties, hobbies, sports and vocations. All these are destined to pass away. The Word of God endures forever and is not only worthy of, but infinitely rewarding to every believer's highest, sincerest and most strenuous and serious devotion.

Practice Makes Perfect

¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ^{6:1} Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,² of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we shall do, if God permits. (Hebrews 5:14-6:3 NAS)

v14, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice [hexis] have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” finds correspondence to the “mature man” in Ephesians 4:13. The one who is mature in sound doctrine (solid food) has *hexis – power acquired by force of repeated use or habit*. We may say that by constant and habitual exercise in Scripture and doctrine, such a one has spiritual antennae suited and tuned to discern good and evil. By contradistinction, the Hebrew readers had been lax in their progress, had focused their learning and teaching time in their meetings on the basics of evangelism, over and over again, never moving to strength-building, mind stretching teaching. (If this sounds like many contemporary churches, with their use of the service teaching time that should be for the equipping of the saints, to instead gear the music, preaching and environment to constant evangelism and “outreach” and altar calls, any similarity is purely coincidental, of course).

Not Practicing Makes Mediocre Non-Teachers

The fact of this expectation should be a clearly stated aspect of the training of the Christian. Local churches and the church universal suffer spiritual weakness when doctrine, and producing teachers of the entire revelation of God's Word, is not central. Doctrinal mediocrity under the auspices of other priorities, including but not limited to, “being relevant,” has become standard fare and sadly acceptable. Christians in these churches rest on their salvation, listening to short, topical “sermonettes for Christianettes,” affirming just basic doctrine. However, by inference this environment teaches that serious devotion to Biblical studies is somehow unattainable, or is for the few professionals. It is even viewed as weird or “radical.” Solid doctrine is portrayed overtly or covertly as divisive or boring. What may be emphasized is serving in some ministry of the church, with selection often based on secular skills, personality, or merely on desperate need rather than spiritual/Scriptural competence. Some may

find themselves in sanctification limbo, waiting for what they think should be the initiative of the Holy Spirit to cause them to feel like dealing with their personal sin hang-ups (James 1:19-25).

Is your Polity Helping or Hindering the Teaching Goal?

Teaching in such churches may be left to the pastor as the hired gun/professional, and perhaps to an associate and a few Sunday school teachers, and not a few pastors are shockingly satisfied with this arrangement. They have no place to put, and can even feel threatened by, believers that may match or excel their own level of training. Because there is no Biblical expectation of breadth and depth in the church, the church gets exactly what it expects. The typical professional “senior/associate pastor” model bears the inherent risk (not always borne out, thankfully) of creating an artificial clergy/laity distinction and does not intrinsically encourage effort toward doctrinal unity and uniformity of Biblical competence, much less surpassing the pastor in knowledge or teaching ability. This ought to be a goal of, and at the heart of good shepherding.

This does not mean that all “senior pastor” ministries are dysfunctional. However, men in such situations would do well to check themselves, their motives, and their church progress against the checklist the Scriptures set out as the gold standard. If the church, over time, is not producing good teachers in some quantity, and if it doesn't have a place to put them to use, and if they can not rise to match or exceed the senior pastor, thought should be put into asking why that is and what can be done about it.⁷

Certainly there are situations where producing co-equal teachers will not be expected or usual. Tiny rural churches, mission churches, “snow-bird” or transient population churches, and churches in senior living arrangements come to mind as possible examples. But even in this case, the goal should be to produce teachers, evangelists and apologists of at least some equipped capacity.

Why the Heavy Emphasis? – Food for Thought

The reader may be asking, “Why so much emphasis on polity? I wanted to read about the pastor as teacher. I'm a very good Bible teacher and I just want to be an even better one.” Is this not begging the question? The good expositor teaches the entire counsel of God, and not only does he teach it, where appropriate he applies it to himself and alters the course and conduct of his life and ministry accordingly.

The fact is that the book of Acts, the New Testament epistles - in particular the pastoral epistles incontrovertibly propose a church polity of multiple co-equal life-time ministry elders who shepherd among the local church. Each elder thus depicted is able to teach, although varied in duties and some devoting more of their time to what we might consider pulpit teaching than others. The idea of a permanent senior pastor with either associates or elders alongside, under, or over him, is foreign to the text. This is really a non-controversial conclusion arising out of a plain assessment of the relevant texts⁸.

The question then is, how can a pastor teaching in a church that is not in compliance with the text think of himself as whole-heartedly teaching and living the whole counsel of God? There must necessarily be an unhealthy disconnect at some point with the text itself on this important doctrine of ecclesiology. Can a pastor in a church with a Biblically dissonant polity earnestly, from the depths of his heart, pound the pulpit with full conviction when expounding the passages that speak of qualification for pastors, which universally point to co-equal, fully trained, covalent elders who shepherd, oversee and teach?

This is not ultimately a question of polity. This is a question of integrity that each shepherd in such situations must ask of himself as an interpreter, as an expositor and as an example to the flock, and his answer will certainly be tested before his Lord at the Bema. “Am I able to, and do I indeed, exposit those texts, from the pulpit, with the same certainty, precision, freedom, force and with the same demands that the church abide by and obey them as when I pound the pulpit on the doctrine of justification by faith?”⁹

The Station and Status of Pastors as Teachers in the Local Body

The qualifications of elders as shepherds is covered in another chapter in this book. However, the station and status of pastors in view of their duty to teach doctrine actually bears on what they teach, how they teach, and what the perception of their authority to do so is. The divine nature and eternally consequential content of what must be taught to believers carries with it both a weight of glory, and burden of heavy responsibility. Because the Scriptures, which are the thing being taught themselves, tell us that there is but one Head of the body, and one Bridegroom of the church, and one Chief or senior Shepherd of the sheep, any confusion as to whose flock it is and who is over the flock needs to be explicitly and formally settled in the mind of the teacher of the Word. Much teaching is derailed, squandered or causes unnecessary offense because it is not done with careful insight into the station and status of the teacher as assigned by Scripture.

In Acts 20, the apostle Paul had gathered the shepherds, the elders of the church of Ephesus, at Miletus to speak with them as a final good-bye. There he charges them (not the “senior pastor”) with this,

*²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
(Acts 20:28 NAS)*

Several pointed issues raise our curiosity here.

- The command to, “be on guard” (all of you elders), is not just regarding the flock. In other words, they are not to just be on their guard *for* the flock, they are also to be on guard “for yourselves” as a matter first in order. The elders are first to keep guard for one another and then as an extension of that function, to watch for all the flock.
- Paul tells them they are *among* the flock. They are neither strangers to, nor sharply distinct from the flock. They are *among* it.
- He tells the elders (*presbuterous* – from which we obtain both the words *elder* and *presbyter*) that it is the Holy Spirit, not the sheep, who has made them *overseers* – *episkopous* – *one who looks upon* from which is derived the word, *bishop*. But the interpreter should be careful not to import later or modern ecclesiastic hierarchy ideas into this word. The elders (plural) in the Ephesian church are *ones who look upon* something. Because of v 29-30 and the warning about those who would be, “*speaking perverse things*” that something to be overseen is doctrine – what is taught. So the emphasis here is not on lording it over the flock by driving it about according to the shepherd's wish or goal. Rather it is on overseeing and guarding what is taught and believed – doctrine. In the context of the ancient shepherding context, the idea is of shepherds keeping watch on the health, safety, and access to feed. Particular attention is placed on strong guarding from predators or rustlers.
- *To shepherd* – verb, *poimainein* to feed, care for and live among. Interestingly, it is the *act of*

shepherding as a verb, not the noun form, *shepherd*, as an office (as in, “The Pastor”), which is emphasized in the New Testament as a responsibility of elders/overseers. Quite simply, elders do shepherding. The second point worth noting about ancient shepherds is that since they lived among the sheep, they always smelled like sheep, and were identified with the sheep by the villagers and townsfolk.

- It is *the church of God*. It is not pastor Jones' or pastor Smith's flock. It is God's flock and there are any number of elders from among that flock that work as under-shepherds.
- To emphasize that no under-shepherd should ever think the church is his, the fact that it is the flock *which he purchased with his own blood* is offered as final proof.

Church historian Philip Schaff quotes J.B. Lightfoot regarding polity during the Biblical and early apostolic fathers period,

It is certain that throughout the first century, and for the first years of the second, that is, throughout the later chapters of Acts, the Apostolic Epistles, and the writings of Clement and Hermas, Bishop and Presbyter were convertible terms, and the body of men so-called were rulers – so far as permanent rulers existed – of the early church.¹⁰

In 3rd John 1-10, the apostle John the Elder commends Gaius for his adherence to truth and the good report about him, but firmly warns Gaius about a certain Diotrephes who exhibited the following attitudes and behaviors: Diotrephes loves to be first/senior/number one among them. He arrogated to himself the function of controller and gatekeeper of apostolic teaching, thus suppressing the growth of those under him. He went so far as to rail against the apostles, even rejecting apostolic associates and putting those who received them out of the church.

In light of the above, what does the Lord make of senior pastors putting their name on the sign of their church? When is it appropriate for a pastor, or any person or persons, to think of a church as, “my church?”

Peter's Example

¹ Therefore, 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,² 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;³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4 NAS)

The apostle Peter, who here certainly is not behaving as a Pope, the Vicar of Christ on Earth, exhorts the elders in the churches he is writing to as a *fellow elder* – *sumpresbuteros* noun – *a together-with elder*. Peter sets the same humble co-servant tone as did Paul with the Ephesian elders.

- Peter urges them to shepherd the flock of God. They and their fellow elders are to be shepherding, humbly feeding good food and strongly guarding the teaching of God's flock (not their flock).
- They are *among* the flock and identified with its members.
- *Exercising oversight*. Since the context of 1 Peter includes suffering for the faith, and temptation to abandon it, this oversight would include instruction in doctrine and life on how

and why to bear up under suffering and temptation, for the cause of the Lord.

- *Not under compulsion, but voluntarily.* There is little more destructive to the life and effectiveness of a shepherd than to feel humanly or internally/fleshly originated pressures and obligation to do religious work. When the primary pressure is earthly, the primary response will be earthly. The cure is a gracious attitude, living in light of God's kindness, goodness and providence, with eagerness to please him in attitude and word.
- *Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge.* Peter discourages an attitude of ownership or exercise of “this church and these people are my dominion.” The sheep are not the under-shepherds, rather the duty to love and feed, and to guard what is taught them is what is owned by the under-shepherd.
- *Allotted to your charge.* Interestingly, the idea is that someone has assigned a certain portion or range of responsibilities. Apportionment adds weight to the idea of multiple shepherds/elders in one flock who have divided responsibilities among themselves.
- *But being examples to the flock.* A strong contrast to Lording it over. A vital aspect of teaching is modeling – *tupos* – an impression, stamp or mark. To live out the doctrine and the practice that one is trying to transmit in words is among the most powerful teaching methods. It is also basic honesty. For example, one cannot preach the humility of Christ while being a pompous, attention-grabbing jerk.

The Attitude of Pastors as Teachers in the Local Body

Preparing for Cognitive Dissonance

Let us refresh our insight into the nature of the written Word. As divine revelation it is from outside and foreign to this world system and it demands its own world-view and will not tolerate competition. Its truths and propositions are pristine, pure truth, alien and actively hostile to the mind of the flesh. Its beauties are ridiculed, sullied and mocked by a very active prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2). As such, the newly minted child of God will often suffer breath-taking cognitive dissonance. There will be unresolved tension between what God, speaking through the Bible with you its teacher, proposes as true *versus* the so called “truths,” values and world-view he or she was raised with and which were impressed on the mind by the culture, perhaps even in his or her own church, or by a favorite former pastor. Even long-time Christians, especially those not well taught, will suffer significant dissonance: Tension and distance between what they believe and what the Bible actually says will be felt. The author of Hebrews recognizes the cause of this intense struggle:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:12-13 NAS)

The Holy Spirit intentionally brings the child of God under the intense, unblinking, hot gaze of the light of the Word.

As much as a pastor hopes for and enjoys it when his charges respond favorably to his teaching, and many will, there is also another, darker side to good teaching. When the Bible is accurately and well taught in such situations it is common and should be expected that the internal conflict of the mind of

the flesh expresses itself in outward quarrel, opposition, fear, resentment, sorrow, withdrawal and anger. As the messenger of the Scriptures, the pastor as teacher will often be in the line of fire because he is the one who chose to open his mouth with the truth. He may often, until the truth is absorbed and processed, be blamed for exposing uncomfortable truths.

The sign of an experienced, thoughtful, loving and competent shepherd is that in the midst of conflict and wrestling he is readily and calmly able to detect whether the bites on his arms and neck are from an upset sheep or from a savage wolf. Each one requires a distinctly different response, but surprisingly, the same attitude of heart.

A Spiritual Response to Fleshly Resentment

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26 NAS)

There is little that could do more to sour and spoil the reception, impact and influence of the message of the Word than a prideful, self-protective, cold, reactive or resentful attitude on the part of the messenger. The fruit of the Spirit must necessarily be present and active in the life of the Bible teacher.

With dissonance eliciting mental tension and emotional response under the gaze of the Word and thumb of the Spirit, both immature Christians and interested unbelievers may behave badly, sometimes very badly. This is precisely the time when the teacher must deliberately, consciously and habitually rely on the goodness, providence and special graces of the Holy Spirit, not reacting as the opposer probably deserves, but with great self-control as the Spirit wills.

The teacher must be careful in these cases to do the following:

- Determine ahead of time that he must desire the approval of God regarding his words and his attitude. Also determine that fear of man is a trap and a snare.
- Remain unflinchingly faithful to the message of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2-4), but humble and gracious.
- Rely on the supernatural convicting and illuminating work of the Spirit. (John 16:8, Romans 10:17)
- Trust in the goodness of our God who will save his elect and sanctify his saints.
- Expect to be wronged, mistreated or resented, yet return the favor with kindness.
- Express enduring patience and kindness. With gentleness but with firm resolve, he must lovingly press the case for the truth.
- Not make it about winning an argument but about the truth, in love, winning a soul. This may take time, patience and perseverance. What use is it to win a battle and lose the war?
- If he falters in attitude or action, be ready to offer a sincere and humble apology. Repeated failure in this area on the part of a pastor may be cause for the pastor to examine himself, and if change does not take place, for himself or other elders to question his moral qualifications. (1 Timothy 3:3)

The Self-Monitoring and Good Conscience of Shepherds

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (1 Timothy 4:16 NAS)

While Timothy was not an elder-pastor in the permanent sense, Paul's instruction to him as a founding apostolic shepherd certainly bears careful scrutiny and applies to all shepherds. His instruction to Timothy to persevere in self-monitoring his life and the doctrines he was expounding was aimed at the goal of saving not just himself but those around him as well.

Couch explains what is meant here,

Paul does not use the idea of salvation (Greek, $\bar{\sigma}\bar{\omega}\bar{\nu}$) here in reference to eternal, spiritual salvation but in reference to “delivery, rescue, sparing” in the sense of sparing the life, or not ruining the life by making tragic mistakes.¹¹

By contradistinction, one need not look far in 1st Timothy to see such tragic mistakes,

¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:19-20 NAS)

Pastors as Theologians

Every pastor is called to be a theologian. This may come as a surprise to some pastors, who see theology as an academic discipline taken during seminary rather than as an ongoing and central part of the pastoral calling. Nevertheless, the health of the church depends upon its pastors functioning as faithful theologians — teaching, preaching, defending and applying the great doctrines of the faith.¹²

The very nature of modern pastoral ministry is brought under examination by Al Mohler Jr. What is at stake is not just the local church, but the church universal as well as the future of Christianity. Since the church is, “the pillar and support of the truth,” (1 Timothy 3:15) what each and every shepherd chooses to transmit to the next generation is of critical importance.

The idea that theology is a discipline unrelated to, or not directly part of, everyday ministry, preaching and living a sanctified Christian life, is bizarre considering the nature of the Scriptures and our ignorance of spiritual things compared to its brilliant revelation. A contributing factor is the warped view of theology as being an academic discipline outside of and unrelated to one's fellowship with God.

Mohler raises a useful question: Can the health of the church, which depends on full communion and fellowship with the self-revealing God of the Word, be achieved intuitively, that is, without a precise and accurate impartation of the knowledge of God from his Word?

Biblical theology is an accurate, loving, fascinated gaze at the person, attributes, works, requirements, blessings and provision of the God who was, is, and shall forever be. More than that, it is the only way such a thorough gaze can be reliably carried out.

As a theologian, the pastor must be known for what he teaches, as well as for what he knows, affirms and believes. The health of the church depends upon pastors who infuse their congregations with deep biblical and theological conviction. The means of this

*transfer of conviction is the preaching of the Word of God.*¹³

Mohler strikes right at the heart of the problems of many modern churches: They are not served by shepherds who are equipped, charged, and unleashed to infuse their congregations with deep Biblical and theological convictions.

Of those pastors and churches that refuse to invest their time, treasure and talents to become deliberately and overtly theological he uses the frightening term, “doomed”:

*We will be hard pressed to define any activity as being more inherently theological than the preaching of God’s Word. The ministry of preaching is an exercise in the theological exposition of Scripture. Congregations that are fed nothing more than ambiguous “principles” supposedly drawn from God’s Word are doomed to spiritual immaturity — which will become visible in compromise, complacency and a host of other spiritual ills.*¹⁴

The Elephant in the Room

He flicks the switch of the light of the truth. Standing there is revealed the elephant in the room: Not mere pastoral loss of focus on the goal, but the tragic failure to guard against and repel a cultural invasion of the church that has turned ministry inside out and on its head.

*As many observers have noted, today’s pastors are often pulled in many directions simultaneously — and the theological vocation is often lost amidst the pressing concerns of a ministry that has been reconceived as something other than what Paul intended for Timothy.*¹⁵

The reader should look around at other ministries and at his own and see if he finds there the two great cultural beasts here, each tearing shepherds away from Biblical theology as the locus of ministry,

*The managerial revolution has left many pastors feeling more like administrators than theologians, dealing with matters of organizational theory before ever turning to the deep truths of God’s Word and the application of these truths to everyday life.*¹⁶

And the second beast:

The rise of therapeutic concerns within the culture means that many pastors, and many of their church members, believe that the pastoral calling is best understood as a “helping profession.” As such, the pastor is seen as someone who functions in a therapeutic role in which theology is often seen as more of a problem than a solution.

*All this is a betrayal of the pastoral calling as presented in the New Testament.*¹⁷

Mohler’s use of the term, “betrayal” is hard but not overstated. It may even be a modest term when used to describe the state of many ministries.

The Cure for our Ills

He does not leave us in despair of our situations. He also offers the cure. For some the cure will be like a ministry death, and for others like being born again, depending on their current commitments and motivations. The warning in his last sentence below is a sobering assessment, but good cheer and the opportunity of renewal is offered for those who will repent, recover and reclaim genuine pastoral

theology.

Furthermore, it is a rejection of the apostolic teaching and of the biblical admonition concerning the role and responsibilities of the pastor. Today's pastors must recover and reclaim the pastoral calling as inherently and cheerfully theological. Otherwise, pastors will be nothing more than communicators, counselors and managers of congregations that have been emptied of the Gospel and of biblical truth.¹⁸

The Local Church as the Center of Learning and Truth

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2 NAS)

The Biblical shepherd should be constantly on the lookout for those people in his sphere of contact and influence that show interest and aptitude for, and persistent faithfulness in pursuing the things of God. As much as we yearn to see everyone attain unto the full measure of Ephesians 4:11-14, the fact is that not all will, for a variety of reasons.

The wise shepherd understands this fact and will be careful in allocating investment of his time, energy and emotion. There should be a particular, but not exclusive, portion and focus of his energies poured out on those with faithful interest in theological studies, discussion and training.

The wise shepherd will also recognize that no one can be all things to all people. Some shepherds are better at some aspects of teaching or doctrinal understand than others. Some are better at public speaking and some are better at small group teaching. Some are better at listening to the needs of the flock than others, some are better at ministering in counsel than others. Some administer well. A well rounded teaching program will take those faithful students and expose them to the right teachers at the right time. Discipleship, in this sense, should not be haphazard, but deliberate, so that these faithful men, of the kind that Paul speaks, can be trained so that they themselves can gradually and with nurture and attention to doctrine and spiritual life, become teachers and perhaps elders themselves.

The wise shepherd also understands that there will be people who do not advance according to the Ephesians 4:11-14 pattern. Some of these will try to take an extraordinary amount of time and energy from shepherds in debate, “ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.” Others will take time pouring over and over their emotional burdens, but never taking to heart the truths and doctrines that will settle the heart. These ones seem to cherish their hurts more than the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and heavenly seating of Christ, and of their amazing identification with him. Shepherds need to be humble and considerate, but careful of such energy and time drainers. There is a difference between being compassionate and binding the wing of a broken saint, and simply throwing your pearls before swine. Learn to allocate energy and time in a wise proportion and do not be sucked into the vortex of the sin of others.

The Pulpit as Portal

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. (1 Timothy 4:13 NAS)

No single passage better captures the spirit of pulpit ministry than this. There are three aspects to this vital ministry that serve as a portal for the listener into the things divine and wonderful.

First, there is the public reading of Scripture. Sermons which do not read the Scripture, but focus on some other lesson or story, are not spiritually useful. Article 25 of the Chicago Statement of Biblical

Hermeneutics is starkly and pointedly useful here:

***We affirm** that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God.*

***We deny** that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.¹⁹*

It is appropriate, of course, to use other lessons and stories to help illuminate and illustrate the meaning and applications of the text, but the lessons and stories can never replace the text nor the core content of the sermon. If you're not reading and expositing the text, you're doing something other than what the pulpit is for.

Second, based on the content of Scripture, the hortatory appeal of the shepherd is not to tickle the ear and affirm the listener in his complacency, but to urge him to change his mind to disagree with what he thought before, and agree with God (*metanoia* – repent), and to walk forward with God under his truth and guidance and not according to the world system or the flesh.

Third, to teach doctrine. Teaching, *didaskalia*, is the orderly, authoritative, didactic impression of truth on the mind, with the expectation of conformity to that truth.

When these three aspects fill the mind, heart and occupation of the one in the pulpit, then the oracles of God will be faithfully delivered and the body of Christ will have those things most necessary for the Holy Spirit to do the work of his divine office.

Emphasis of Pulpit Ministry

The Holy Spirit went to tremendous trouble over history to write the Scriptures just as he did, and to order the words, sentences, sections and books. He had an idea in mind, it seems. The shepherd should pay attention to this. The bulk of pulpit ministry should be book by book exposition. This allows the Holy Spirit to set the order, emphasis and story-line. A lesser proportion should be systematics/doctrinal, and an even smaller proportion, topical.

A program that offers Sunday school and weekly Bible studies, and where multiple elders can offer classes may be able to change this proportion and fill out the needs for learning the Scriptures.

It is the view of the author that over half of pulpit ministry should be book by book, line by line exposition. A somewhat lesser portion should be systematic/doctrinal, and no more than ten to twenty percent of pulpit sermons should be explicitly topical.

Pulpits that focus on topical teaching inherently teach people to rely on the pastor for application instead of for Biblical understanding. Topical teaching does not inherently set the whole context of a passage and is not focused on expositing through it. People long under this system generally cannot think their way out of a paper bag, theologically speaking. They become too reliant on the pastor to think theologically and Biblically for them.

There is a place, from time to time, for topical teaching from the pulpit. There is a need to address certain vital issues from the pulpit. However, the overall context and content of passages previously taught expositively sets the right framework for the topic. Too much topical and the content and context are not taught.

A good way to address topical issues is out of the natural flow of a text already being expounded line by line. This way the context and text meaning are already settled and known, and the topic becomes an obvious application of the text before the sermon moves on to the next line. This way there is no

appearance of the shepherd forcing a topical issue because it is favorite “dead horse to beat.”

It is vital that the shepherd in the pulpit actually, regularly and faithfully demonstrate in a natural an interesting manner the proper use of context, grammar, historical and archaeological information in his sermons. This is setting the best hermeneutical example for the flock to follow in their own studies. If he is constantly pre-digesting everything and serving pabulum to the pew, people may gain good application but will lack the skills to validate what the pastor is claiming, and will not be able to arrive at the same results in their own studies. One does not have to grind through every Greek inflection, but an occasional use of particularly important words does a great service to the saints. It tells them about the verbal inspiration of Scriptures. One does not need to fill the sermon with theological jargon, but judicious use and explanation of words like justification, propitiation, sanctification, hamartiology, teleology and so forth acquaint them with the language of theology and serve as very precise anchors for further discussion. They are like the piles of stones the Lord told the Israelites to plant as a remembrance for later generations.

Do not overwhelm with technical details, but do not insult by refusing to engage the mind of the listener. The things of God are infinitely fascinating because they come from an infinite God. One should expect that attempting to plumb the depths of such a Person and his work will engage the highest and best thinking of the human mind, and then some. The man in the pulpit does no one any favors by making things simpler than are possible. Theology is more like history, zoology and math than it is like jazz or modern art and the pastor would do well to let his charges know this, repeatedly.

Thinking is hard work, and thinking well is ten times harder than that. Many Christians have been allowed to not only not think well, but to barely think at all. They have been taught that they can somehow intuit the things of God. The duty of the shepherd is to get people thinking and then hopefully thinking well about all things pertaining to God: Theology. *But we have the mind of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 2:16)

Systematic/doctrinal teaching, for example, a series on the doctrine of the Trinity, or justification by faith alone, should comprise a good but lesser portion of pulpit time. The core doctrines of the faith should be taught as a priority in this way. Again, these doctrines can often be taught as part of the regular exposition through a passage. The Trinity is found in many places, or the doctrine of anthropology, for example.

Do not misuse Scripture

There is a real temptation to use Scripture for the pragmatic goal of achieving good ends. A shepherd may feel that he needs to move the sheep or some sheep or one sheep from point A to point B to accomplish some good ministry end. The temptation may be quite real to use Scripture to accomplish this purpose. The shepherd, in the teaching function, must exhibit extraordinary caution to ensure that he is the one being used as an instrument of Scripture and not vice-versa.

Another way that Scripture can be misused is to be expositing through a sermon, and then take a textually unjustified departure onto a favorite topic, or something bothering the pastor, or to address an unrelated issue in the church. This is, in fact an abuse of the pulpit and the text and is faithlessness to one's duty. Teach the text before you and exposit it faithfully with textually true applications, and let the Holy Spirit sort out the bigger picture. The shepherd is to serve as an example, and that includes the self-disciple to be the servant of the text and not the other way around.

The Local Church as Seminary

...but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15 NAS)

As useful as seminaries and Bible schools are to the church, God never had in mind that they would replace, supplant or rise above the local church as the center, the locus of learning. Nor did God intend that churches would become dependent on these institutions for producing shepherds. This has ever been the duty and calling of the local church. It has only been with the reliance on the professionalized senior pastor system that dependence on seminaries has become so profound. It is this authors view that this profound dependence has weakened the authority and effectiveness of the church.

With a properly outfitted and theologically astute body of elders who shepherd, the local church can and should be restored to its rightful place as the primary institution of theological study and training in practical ministry. In this environment, seminaries and Bible schools, with judicious attention to their doctrinal content, can be put to good use as adjunct training resources to the general training program of the local church. They are very good at teaching the Biblical languages, for example.

A body of elders may detect that they are theologically weak in a certain area or could benefit from training in systematic theology or eschatology. In this case it may benefit that church to send an elder to school with the idea of bringing that knowledge back to transmit to the other elders. There are some excellent distance education schools as well, that allow deep theological studies while remaining local.

The goal of the church, however, should be to rely less or as a minority on these institutions and be regularly and routinely training, transmitting and living out the deep truths of the Christian faith. Seminaries and schools can be extraordinarily expensive and create tremendous financial burden and debt on students, and artificially push them towards taking pastorates in churches that can pay them in proportion to that debt. The local church needs to carefully assess these costs as a stewardship issue and wisely use these institutions where appropriate to its goals.

Words of Caution about Seminaries, Bible Schools and Accreditation

Because they are not under the oversight of the local church elders, some of these institutions may also spring theological leaks and serve as efficient conduits for quickly spreading diseased theology. While it is true the local church can spring leaks too, its influence is necessarily narrow and geographically isolated. Schools are broader in their influence. Accreditation and desire for uniform academic recognition of theological studies as a discipline on its own at these schools has turned out to be less of a boon than might be supposed and can be the source of infiltration of bad theology. It is certainly a source of increased tuition. The local church needs to keep regular tabs on these schools, and communicate regularly regarding the spiritual and doctrinal health of students attending them from the local church. The adage, “Trust, but verify,” is appropriate.

Developing a Theological Library

The local church should be investing in and developing a good theological library, under the inspection of the elders. Not just any book should be thrown in, rather a deliberate approach should be taken to developing this resource. It is appropriate to have books that contain doctrine the church disagrees with, provided there is some way of letting the reader know this. Members of the church should have the ability to place books in the library on loan, thus saving the church redundant costs. As a stewardship, there must be some library management system to organize as well as assure return of

books. Students should be trained that the care and return of books is a moral issue.

Conclusion

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4 NAS)

Setting the mind on things above is not some mystical experience, or going about concentrating on ones navel. Rather it is a deliberate and active mental exercise, an attitude of life, and an active trust that dwells and relies in real life on the revealed truths of our wonderful God and his abode. Setting the mind on things above is the actual exercise of the theological “muscle.” Like all muscles, it can either be strengthened by exercise or weakened by disuse. The call of the shepherd as teacher is to be the expert muscle-building trainer, encouraging others in their progress, adding weights for them and increasing the reps, while he pays attention to his own progress, his technique, and that of his fellow trainers/elders.

It has been this author's experience that when pastors and churches shift the focus of their discussion and gaze on *relevance* and *contextualizing*, then energy and attention necessarily shift to the earthly and away from gazing at our beautiful Triune God through Biblical and systematic theology. The mind is no longer set on things above. When this happens, divine light of revelation is obscured, pastors don't have anything heavenly or spiritual worth saying, and churches are bereft and impoverished of those eternal truths worth believing. They end up in the very place they thought to avoid: Having nothing relevant to say or truth to contextualize.

Truth is never irrelevant and doctrine is a big fellow and always manages to find elbow room to contextualize himself in lives, minds and hearts. Truth and doctrine are all grown up, far more ancient than us, and don't need our supervision or help. What they do need is to be known and set free to do what they do best under the auspices of the Holy Spirit.

It is the charge, high calling and blessed privilege of the pastor as teacher to unleash these dynamos of the Spirit to the building up of Christ's body and for his glory.

- 1 1 Peter 5:1-4 – it is worthy of note that Peter here neither elevates himself as Pope, nor does he set himself or his fellow elders as over the flock. “Among” is used twice.
- 2 John 21:14-18 – author's translation. In verses 15 and 17, *Gk-boske- "be feeding"* - v, present active imperative, and in v16, *poimaine - "be shepherding"* - v, present active imperative. The ongoing nature of these duties is emphasized and by repetition, prioritized.
- 3 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 – The doctrine of rewards demonstrates the fact that motives are mixed and will be judged as such by the standard of the Word, by the living Word.
- 4 It is assumed here that the reader understands that Apostles and Prophets are no longer given to the church, but that Evangelists and Pastors and Teachers are.
It has been a not uncommon error to try to apply Granville Sharp's rule of Greek grammar here to have this say, “Pastors who are teachers” or “Pastors indeed teachers.” Sharps rule does not apply here since the nouns are plural.
- 5 In considering this and in light of Paul's first warning letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, “I follow Paul,” “I follow Cephas,” one wonders what he would think of our churches placing the pastor's name and the associates name on the church sign. It would seem that Paul would be more approving of a sign that read, “The body of Christ, reaching toward maturity and the stature of Christ, meeting at Pine and Smith Street.”
- 6 Biblical Orthopraxis: - *Straight (not crooked) Practice*. Practice in one's life, relationships and social conduct and attitudes, and with regard to the body of Christ, corporate worship, music, ministry and practice that is consistent with sanctification, the fruit of the Spirit, and which corresponds to Biblical practice, sound doctrine and apostolic instruction as conduct proper in the household of God.
- 7 Labeling a board of directors as “elders” does not solve this problem. Arguably a good, qualified senior pastor faithfully teaching the Word is better in the short term than a board of “elders” who are not qualified or who do not themselves teach the Word.
- 8 Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 23, 20:17-30, 21:18, 1 Tim 5:17 on paying elders who work hard at preaching and teaching, Titus 1:5-14, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5
- 9 This author has been asked to fill the pulpit in various churches on many occasions. More than once he's been asked specifically not to teach out of the sections of the pastoral epistles that deal with church polity, “because it's too controversial.” The fact is, these passages are not at all difficult to interpret, exposit or understand. They're not controversial in their interpretation, they're simply difficult to believe and obey.
- 10 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 22 volumes (reprint, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988), 1:488
- 11 Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church*, (Kregel, 1999), 197
- 12 *The Pastor as Theologian*, R. Albert Mohler Jr., www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/09/the-pastor-as-theologian.pdf
- 13 Ibid, 9
- 14 Ibid, 9
- 15 Ibid, 6
- 16 Ibid, 6
- 17 Ibid, 6
- 18 Ibid, 7
- 19 *The Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics*, Article XXV, http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf