

WHAT IS THE PASTOR'S TASK?

4 ⁴[There is] one body and one Spirit—just as the calling to which you were called has one hope—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But to each one of us grace was given, as the gift of Christ was measured out to us. ⁸This is why it says, “When he ascended into the heights, he led captivity as his captive, and gave gifts to men.” ⁹(Now what does it mean that “he ascended”? [It can only mean] that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth. ¹⁰The same one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, in order that he might fill all things.) ¹¹He is the one who gave the apostles, and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers ¹²to prepare the saints for the work of ministry for the purpose of building up the body of Christ ¹³until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, [until we become] a mature man, [until we attain] the level of the stature of [having] the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴[Furthermore, he gave pastors and teacher] in order that we should no longer be children, being tossed back and forth and being blown about by every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men [working] in craftiness for the deceit [inherent] in error. ¹⁵But practicing the truth in love, with regard to all things let us grow up in him, the one who is the head, [that is,] Christ. ¹⁶By him the whole body, being joined together and held together by every supporting ligament, grows—building itself up in love—as each individual part does its work. (Eph. 4:4-16)

Introduction

What is the pastor supposed to do? What is his job? If you were to write up a job description for your pastor, how would it read?

A typical job description might well read like this: The pastor is expected to preach, to counsel, to administer the sacraments, to visit the sick and bereaved, and to insure that the church runs smoothly.

Notice three things about such a job description: First, it is very “maintenance” oriented; there is a heavy emphasis on maintaining the church, as opposed to growth. Second, it is very “consumer” oriented; the Christian in the pew assumes the role of a consumer who passively receives the pastor’s services. Third, in the light of Ephesians 4:11-16, it is less than biblical.

Let us consider Christ’s job description for pastors as it is defined for us in Ephesians 4:11-16.

I. It is the Pastor’s Task to Prepare the Christian for Active Service (4:12-13)

The Lord Jesus Christ has given pastor/teachers to His church in order to “*prepare the saints.*” The Greek term, καταρτίζω, means, “to mend,” “to restore,” or “to prepare;” the idea is that of preparing something or someone for useful service. In Matthew 4:21 the word is used to describe the fishermen mending

their nets: *“Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing [or, mending] their nets.”* Thus, all of the pastor’s various labors (preaching, teaching, counseling, visiting, etc.) are to be viewed as the means by which the Christian himself is being prepared for **action**. By way of illustration: The Christian should not view himself as a tourist on a luxury liner, absorbing the ship’s service and enjoying the cruise. On the contrary, the Christian should rather view himself as a navy pilot aboard an aircraft carrier, being equipped and prepared for his next mission. How should you view the pastor’s ministry? You should not simply view it as personally oriented, asking, “What can I personally derive from this ministry?” Instead, you should ask, “How is this ministry preparing me for spiritual action and service?”

The saints (the typical New Testament designation for “Christian,”) are being prepared *“for the work of ministry (or, service.)”* The spiritual work for which the Christian is being prepared every time he is exposed to and is the recipient of the pastor’s ministry is *“the work of ministry”* (διακονία.) That is to say, as a Christian, you are being prepared to become more like the Lord Jesus Himself in His ministry of humble service, note Matthew 20:28, *“the Son of man did not come to receive ministry, but to minister (διακονέω.)”* More specifically, the Christian is being prepared to perform a ministry of service to his fellow Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ:

You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature [to express itself]; rather, serve one another with love—¹⁴for the whole law is fulfilled in one commandment, [namely] this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal. 5:13-14)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit; but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. ⁴Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

The Christian, by means of the pastor’s ministry of the Word, is being prepared for service for the purpose of *“building up of the body of Christ.”* As the pastor (through preaching, teaching, counseling, visiting, etc.) prepares you for service, and as you actively engage in service to one another (for example, in the form of faithful prayer, practical concern, the active use of your spiritual gifts,) the body of Christ is built up: it develops spiritually more and more into the likeness of Christ. The goal is for us all to *“attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, until we become a mature man, [until we attain] the level of the stature of [having] the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13.) We certainly do not attain that goal in this present life. However, every act of service and every increment of spiritual development play a vital role in the final realization of that goal, which shall be fully accomplished when Christ returns in glory. By way of illustration: A model ship in a bottle is made by painstakingly assembling and binding together

all the minute parts. When the construction has been completed, the hull of the ship is slipped into the bottle with the sails laying flat upon the deck. Then the craftsman pulls a string that is attached to the rigging of the ship, up come the sails and the model ship majestically fills the bottle. But the successful completion of the project is dependent upon the painstaking assembly and joining together of all the parts, no matter how insignificant each individual assembly may have appeared to be.

The pastor's task is to prepare the Christian—and the congregation of Christians collectively—for active service. Whenever you are exposed to the pastor's ministry and are the recipient of his ministry, you should prayerfully ask: "How will this particular ministry help me and prepare me to more effectively engage in active service for Christ and service to His people?" For example, the pastor's teaching or preaching or counseling has been used by God to relieve you of a heavy burden of soul; not so that you can now get on with your own private life and personal agenda, but so that you can serve Christ and His body more effectively.

II. It is the Pastor's Task to Help the Christian towards Spiritual Maturity (4:14-16)

The Christian is not useful to Christ, and it is not safe for himself personally, to remain in a state of spiritual infancy or immaturity. The Christian who is found in such a condition is described as very susceptible to being "*tossed back and forth and being blown about by every wind of doctrine.*" The picture is that of a helpless little boat at the mercy of the fierce winds and raging waves of the sea. The Christian who lives in a state of spiritual infancy and immaturity lacks spiritual stability: he does not know what he should believe; he relies heavily upon his feelings. Furthermore, he lacks spiritual discernment: there is the tendency to uncritically accept anything and everything without discrimination or evaluation in the light of the Bible. Such a person is very vulnerable to being carried away "*by the cunning of men [working] in craftiness for the deceit [inherent] in error.*" Such was the case with the Galatians, to whom the Apostle Paul writes, "*I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by grace, [and turning] to a different gospel—which is not another [gospel]. Certain men are troubling you and seeking to distort the gospel of Christ*" (Gal. 1:6-7.) As he writes to the Colossians, "*continue in the faith, established and firm, not moved away from the hope [contained in] the gospel*" (Col. 1:23.)

The Lord has provided us with pastor/teachers "*so that we should no longer be children (or, babes)*"—who are spiritually vulnerable. The pastor, as shepherd, is to guide and guard the sheep. He is to do so by providing sound biblical instruction. In Acts 20:29 the Apostle Paul warns the church of grievous wolves, and in verse 32 he commits the church to the Word of God's grace: "*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock ...*

³²Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Rather than remaining in that useless and very vulnerable state of spiritual immaturity, we are to grow into Christ "*with regard to all things.*" What does this mean? It means that every dimension of life (business, family, recreation, etc.) is to be brought under Christ's control and is to be evaluated in the light of His Word, by asking such questions as: "In the light of God's Word, is this particular activity good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable? Is this particular outlook true or false, right or wrong?"

Does it seem severe to bring **everything** under Christ's control and in submission to His absolute lordship? Let us only consider how much of what we presently do is being controlled by the world: how we dress, how we act, how we think; how much is being presently dictated and controlled by our peers, by television and motion pictures, by mass media advertising. The sign and danger of spiritual immaturity: you are uncritically and even unconsciously accepting the world's views and control, while you are either drifting away from or actively resisting Christ's views and control. The sign of spiritual growth towards maturity: you are evaluating the world's views (on business practices, sexual conduct, and every other area of life) in the light of the Bible and bringing every part of your life under the divine lordship of Christ.

How does this growth towards spiritual maturity take place? The answer, by "*practicing the truth in love.*" Note, the phrase translated, "*speaking the truth,*" can better be translated, "*practicing, or, living the truth.*" The process of growth towards spiritual maturity happens as the pastor/teacher ministers the truth of God to us, and as we receive the Word of truth, and respond to it in faith and obedience, and as we lovingly minister the truth to one another, note Colossians 3:16a, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.*"

The pastor's task is to help the Christian towards spiritual maturity. Whenever you are exposed to and are the recipient of the pastor's ministry, you should prayerfully ask, "Am I willingly receiving the Word of God? Am I responding to the Word of God in faith and obedience? Is the ministry of the Word contributing to my spiritual maturity, am I allowing it to do so?"

Conclusion

What is the pastor's task?

The pastor's God-given task is two-fold: 1) his task is to prepare the Christian for active service and ministry; and 2) his task is to help the Christian towards spiritual maturity.

As we are exposed to the pastor's ministry and are the recipients of it, we should honestly and prayerfully ask ourselves such questions as these: "Am I supporting my pastor in the fulfillment of his biblically-defined ministry, or am I seeking to have him serve me in a manner that is accommodating to me personally? Am I applying myself to the ministry he offers and am I profiting from it?"