

Pastoral Ministry: A Personal Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

The ministry of spreading the Gospel is given to everyone who is born of the Spirit. In the lifelong journey of following Jesus, every individual is commissioned to spread the good news of salvation to those who have not yet heard it, thereby mobilizing the universal church. The foundations of this ministry spring from the words of Christ himself, written and preserved for future generations, in the Bible.

A generous portion of contemporary Christian literature devotes itself to the study and analysis of pastoral ministry: its highs and lows, methods that work and methods that don't, in-depth analyses of firsthand accounts, situational research, and many more. Much of the essential points narrated in Scripture is lost in the volumes of modern work and study; however, and a return to God's original intent for the ministry through extensive study of the Holy Book itself is imperative. Despite the fact that culture is at a constant state of change and thus requires a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability on the side of the pastor, the church must see to it that God's purpose and plan for His children is not ultimately lost.

The truths and convictions asserted in this paper express a personal view of the core and substance of pastoral ministry that is based primarily on the tenets of Scripture and supplemented by a number of notable works by distinguished authors. It intends to provide direction for both the pastor and the congregation in developing the ministry, as well as to emphasize on the key points and elements of nurturing the growing church through milestones founded on love and obedience.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

As evidenced by the number of different Christian denominations in today's society, it is very difficult to acquire one coherent and universal understanding of what pastoral ministry is and ought to be. Even members of a single congregation eventually come to disagree on how administration, or events and other programs should be managed and implemented. People can have quite a difference in opinion when it comes to matters of the church, in spite of the fact that they are prepared and shaped in the same tradition. James W. Thompson says in his book *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision*, that members of the same church can “work with many unstated and differing assumptions about the nature of the ministry.”

It is important to note that Scripture, not personal opinion, has the final say on the essential cornerstones of pastoral ministry. In order to have a more vivid picture of how the combined activity of witnessing and discipleship came to be, an examination of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments is necessary. Without a theological foundation, the pastor can easily become the victim of a culture-based focus shift from nurturing a relatively undiluted ministry to competing in the global church market.

Old Testament Themes

God himself assumes a pastoral role with His people as expressed in Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” This verse envelops authority, care, courage, sacrificial love, and many other attributes required of a pastor as he immerses himself in the service of the church.

In his analysis of the historical aspect of pastoral ministry, James F. Stitzinger proposes that it is necessary for today's ministers to pattern their view of the church or the flock according to how God himself tended to them in the Old Testament. Notable verses provide a glimpse of these attributes in the context of a people ministered to by God himself, and include: Genesis 49:24, “But his bow will remain steady, and his hands will be skillful; because of the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel;” Isaiah 53:6, “All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the LORD caused the sin of all of us to attack him;” Psalm 78:53, “He guided them safely along, while the sea covered their enemies;” and Psalm 80:1, “...you who lead Joseph like a flock of sheep! You who sit enthroned above the winged angels, reveal your splendor!”

Stitzinger further explains that the profound evidence of God's love for his people is exemplified and demonstrated in the story of Hosea, with Israel likened to a harlot. The Father says in Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a young man, I loved him like a son, and I summoned my

son out of Egypt.” This great love is further emphasized throughout the Old Testament, as in Isaiah 43:4-5, “Since you are precious and special in my sight, and I love you, I will hand over people in place of you, nations in place of your life. Don’t be afraid, for I am with you...”

Springing from God’s unconditional love for his people are several points of note. Scripture says that the Lord disciplines those He loves (Proverbs 3:11), holds them accountable and rewards them for their deeds (Psalm 11:7), and charges them to return this love (Deuteronomy 6:5).

In addition to this, pastors ought to show mercy as the Lord has shown mercy (Isaiah 54:10), and compassion (Psalm 145:9). And in all other circumstances, the central theme is that of doing God’s work through faith as exemplified in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and many other characters of note.

Old Testament Offices

Stories in the Old Testament frequently depict the important role of the prophets in advancing the work and purpose of God. These prophets spoke for God to the people (Exodus 7:1-2, Daniel 9:6) and were under His divine command. They conducted themselves in obedience and told the nations what the Lord intended for them to hear. The message that they spoke was that which came from God himself (Deuteronomy 18:18, Jeremiah 1:9), and not something they came up or created on their own. They were not to take liberties in adding to or taking away from this message.

In his report on Old Testament offices, John E. Johnson points out that priests in the Old Testament were identified with sacrifice, intercession, and blessing. Central to the character of the Levite priests was holiness, this being holistic in essence, for they were excluded from the altar if they had physical illnesses and ailments (Leviticus 21:17). He spoke to God for the people, thus approaching the Father more closely than anyone else.

Sages or wise men were channels for God’s wisdom. Johnson explains that these men were “set apart to exhort people to fear the Lord” (Proverbs 1:7) and provided right counsel. Solomon was the most popular sage of the Old Testament (1 Kings 4:29-32), and directed his listeners to the divine wisdom and demands of the Law. According to J. Barton Payne in his book entitled *The Theology of the Older Testament*, “the priest guided the repentant to the way of forgiveness in the law; the prophet aroused the sinner to the point of repentance; the wise counseled him not to do the wrong in the first place.”

The office of the king had a profound impact on the development of God’s ministry in the Old Testament. Kings were to exercise their authority with wisdom, defend and preserve the nation, and make sure that justice was maintained. Encompassing all of these roles, however, was the central charge to fear the Lord (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Such reverent awe was the

motivation for all that the king did right in the process of leading the nation, establishing boundaries, utilizing resources, and moving forward into battle (Johnson, 1995).

In the present day, there is no definite distinction between these roles in the Christian community. What used to be a discrete division of functions has now blended in a new and overlapping set of positions in the church patterned after New Testament doctrine. The minister himself must then be able to exhibit and personalize the different attributes of prophet, priest, sage, and king -- although not in their exclusive and literal form as the labels describe – as well as to manifest the *agape* love of the Father, in order to fulfill the role of shepherd to the flock.

New Testament Themes

As the Father led his flock, the Son became Shepherd to believers in the New Testament (John 10:11, 1 Peter 5:4). The identity of Christ as the Good Shepherd culminates in his death and resurrection as he gave his life for the sheep (John 10:11-16) and calls pastors, ministers, and church leaders to show the same love for the church in their practice of leadership and authority, eagerly and willingly under God's direction (1 Peter 5: 1-4). The roles and duties of pastors as presented in the New Testament are the basis of all future biblical ministry in history (Stitzinger, 1995).

The New Testament builds on the foundations of the Old in its revelation of Jesus as the fulfillment of all the aforementioned offices. He becomes the ultimate prophet, priest, king, and sage, and the only Shepherd that souls hunger for (Psalm 23:1). "In one figure alone were all offices adequately united, sufficiently displayed, and fully consummated – Jesus Christ," Thomas Oden states, in his acclaimed work, *The Word of Life*. John E. Johnson further explains that in Christ's early ministry, He "first appeared as a Prophet, then as a wise Sage." In His passion and death on the cross, He revealed his identity as Priest (Hebrews 4:14); and in His glorification, He is ruler of the spiritual church (Colossians 1:18) and will return to establish his authority over the world as King of kings (Revelation 19:16).

As Jesus fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17) by living it out in spirit, so He fulfilled and personified these roles in His life. He taught not merely with words, but was God's own living Word. He interceded, not as a Levitical priest with animal sacrifice, but as the great High Priest, bringing the sacrifice of His own body. He counseled, not as a mere sage, but as the very personification of wisdom. And Christ governs, not like the rulers of the earth, but as the Heir of all things (Johnson, 1995).

New Testament Offices

In the New Testament, there are five distinct terms that refer to the pastoral office: [1] elders are gifted in administration and spiritual guidance (1 Peter 5:1-4), [2] bishops or overseers

practice guidance, oversight, and leadership in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-5), [3] shepherds or pastors lead and practice authority (Ephesians 4:11), [4] preachers proclaim the Word of God to the people (1 Timothy 2:7), and [5] teachers are responsible for the instruction and exposition of Scripture (1 Timothy 2:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28-19). Scripture is quite clear that these descriptive titles relate to the same pastoral office (Johnson, 1995).

The terms above are often mentioned in the Bible as synonymous roles (Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Peter 5:1-2, James 5:14). J.B. Lightfoot notes that it was not until the “second century that bishops took the places of the apostles and presided over groups of elders.” In this light, it is gathered that pastoral ministry and leadership in the present church included the roles of preaching, teaching, oversight, and shepherding, all of which point to a single role, which is the office of the pastor (Johnson, 1995).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Pastor

The King James Dictionary defines *pastor*, a word taken from the Latin *pasco/pastum* which means “to feed,” is used to refer to a shepherd, or one that has the care of flocks and herds. The Greek word for pastor is *poimen*, which literally means “shepherd.” The term translates in modern church language as a minister of the gospel who has the church and congregation, whose duty is to watch over the people of his charge, and instruct them in the sacred doctrines of the Christian religion.

John White, in his article entitled, *The Pastor – His Identity and Authority*, observes however, that “the minister serving in today’s secular culture is confronted with an eroded image of the pastor.” In a society where information is the most prized and valuable commodity, pastors are not very often thought of as the most educated and wisest men in the community. The minister is often torn between the role of evangelist, friendly church visitor, counselor, etc. In addition, he is influenced by new developments in psychology and therapeutic counseling, and consequently faces basic ambiguities in the performance of his tasks (White, 2008). In order for the minister to find direction along this path, he must return to God’s original purpose and intention for the office.

Craig Bluemel points out, in an expository article examining the biblical role of pastors in the church, that English translations of the bible translate the Greek *poimen* as “pastor” only once in the entire New Testament, and this can be found in Ephesians 4:11: “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” In this verse, “pastor” is listed as one of the offices that God has appointed in the church. However, it is essential to note that the term is written in the plural form, which, according to the rules of Greek grammar, implies that “pastors” and “teachers” here refer to one office (Bluemel, 2005).

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter reminds the elders to “feed the flock of God which is among you,” and to be “examples to the flock.” In verse 4, he reminds them of their responsibility to the Chief Shepherd, who we know is Jesus Christ. Based on this passage, it can be understood that pastors – whom we now know are also referred to as elders -- whose duty is to care for God’s children, perform their roles under the supervision and for the love of Christ.

It can be deduced, therefore, that a pastor’s responsibilities include serving others, living out the Word through action, loving the flock, and showing concern for the congregation, especially the weak and the needy (Schooley, Keith, 2000). Oden’s (1983) definition helps to narrow it down: “‘The pastor,’ concisely defined, is a member of the body of Christ who is called by God and the church and set apart by ordination representatively to proclaim the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to guide and nurture the Christian community toward full response to God’s self-disclosure”

Ministry

Martin Luther once said, “The idea that service to God should have only to do with a church altar, singing, reading, sacrifice, and the like is without doubt but the worst trick of the devil. How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that the service of God takes place only in the church and by works done therein. The whole world could abound with services to the Lord... not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, and field.”

In this context, it is evident that Luther understood that “ministry” is not a job exclusive for pastors and leaders in the church. Before this subject is given further explanation, however, it is necessary to look back on what Scripture says about ministry, what it is, and what it is not.

Old Testament ministry primarily referred to the duties of prophets, priests, kings, and other notable men of God. Priestly functions, for example, included the offering of sacrifices, teaching, and meditation on the sacred Scripture, among other things (MTS, 2012).

According to the US Center for Christian Leadership, the word “ministry” in Greek, is *diakonia*, which literally translates to “service.” It is used in the New Testament, referring to the act of helping people in need, to serve tables (Acts 6:1), to distribute financial resources (2 Corinthians 9:12), and even to proclaim the Gospel (Acts 20:24). In addition, it is stated in Ephesians 4:11-12 that some were “to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service [*diakonia*], so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Here, then, is the biblical foundation of ministry that encompasses virtually any form of service done in the name of Christ and for the well-being of the church.

Many passages in the New Testament make it clear that ministry does not only refer to deliberate acts of intentional service such as giving to the poor or helping the needy, but also includes even the daily routines and activities that people tend to perform mechanically and without much thought as to their purpose in a deeper dimension than that of mere duty and necessity. 1 Corinthians 10:31 reads, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” This verse is further emphasized in Colossians 3:17, which says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Also, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24). The all-inclusive phrase, “whatever you do,” indicates that ministry encompasses both the so-called “significant” things people do, as well as the mundane (CCL, 2009).

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

“If the bold intention of Christian ministry is to combine the various Old Testament offices into a single office, how is the pastoral role to be understood?” – Thomas Oden

In conjunction with the appointments and tasks stipulated in both the Old and New Testaments, the pastor can find his identity and role spectrum in the aforementioned positions:

As a prophet

The pastor is tasked to declare the Word of God (1 Corinthians 15:3, Galatians 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:13). He must make sure to avoid the danger of inadvertently manipulating or misinterpreting Scripture so that it supports the message he personally wants to convey. He is, as Johnson puts it, to be the mouthpiece of God. This, however, does not in any way place the minister’s words in equal rank with that of the Father. It simply means that it is the prophetic task and calling of every pastor to expound on Scripture based on how it manifests meaning according to context and in conjunction with the rest of the Bible.

As a prophet, he is also to carry the Word like a burden (Johnson, 1995). 1 Corinthians 9:16 says, “... Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” Pastors should have such a thirst for the preaching of the Word so that it burdens them if they are unable to do so. Their heart cries out to the unreached and the unbelievers who are in great need of a Savior and who have not yet heard – or who have previously rejected – the Good News of salvation. In doing so, he must also be ready to pay the price for boldly preaching the Word of God (Isaiah 6:11, Jeremiah 16, Daniel 6). Many pastors, especially those whose ministries are located in areas where the Gospel is proclaimed openly, may discount the importance of this particular aspect of their identity. It is to be emphasized, however, that bold preaching of the gospel may involve battling against opposing forces, rejection, and worldly condemnation.

As a priest

The New Testament points out that all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6). Pastors share a priestly identity with all believers and, in addition, hold a legitimate link with the Old Testament office that must not be overlooked (Johnson, 1995). As priests, ministers are called to console and comfort those of the flock who are in need of spiritual as well as emotional nurturing. It is also part of his function to intercede and pray to the Father for the people, although it must be noted that *all* believers are given this particular responsibility (1 Timothy 2:1-2, James 5:16). Intercession, as Johnson puts it, is at the very center of a pastor’s calling – what might be referred to as the central priestly act. Paul modeled this role more than several

times (Romans 1:8-10, 2 Corinthians 13:7-9, Ephesians 1:15-23, Colossians 1:3-14, 2 Timothy 1:3-7, Philemon 4-7). Similarly, he instructs future pastors to follow his example (1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8).

When he is told of sin among the people, the pastor seeks to encourage reconciliation with God. He shares the people's pain, and rejoices in the people's joy. Whenever he bears up with their pain and experiences the hurt of their sin, the pastor takes on the identity of a sacrificial victim, paying a certain price for people's sins (Johnson, 1995). In addition, he guards the congregation's methods of worship and maintains holiness in the church and in his personal walk as well (Leviticus 11-15).

As a sage

Pastors must have an inward passion that burns to seek for truth. They must hunger for understanding and thirst for discernment, bearing in mind that wisdom is a gift from God (James 1:5-6, 3:13-18). In their quest for understanding, they observe the lives of other people and look on events through a divine viewpoint. As they acquire wisdom and discernment, they also provide counsel to those who are new and weak in the faith.

God-given wisdom manifests in the pastor's life as it becomes orderly, pure, and with passions under control (Proverbs 5-7). His live and actions promote peace and reconciliation, gentleness, righteousness, truth, kindness, etc.

As a king

Kingship, in the context of pastoral ministry, does not mean that the minister rules or reigns over the church. Instead, it charges him to take on the essential characteristics that were true of the great rulers of Israel : leadership, vision, and stewardship (Johnson, 1995).

As a leader, the pastor unites the people toward a common goal, provides direction in decision-making, and guides the people continually forward (Joshua 24:14-24). As Oden notes, "They are not just pastors to individuals, but to a community that hungers for a wise and useful ordering of itself." Johnson further explains that wise pastors will not override the judgment of their people by the force of their own prerogatives. Instead, they recognize that authority rests with God, and that the way up is down.

Part of this overall leadership is leadership in battle. Just as a king was called on to lead a nation into battle, so pastors are to take the lead in spiritual conflicts (Johnson, 1995). This includes educating the congregation regarding the principles and procedures of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-17).

In order to be men of vision, pastors need to be sensitive to that vision which God places in their heart. They do not endeavor to seek glory for personal ambitions and personal goals. Consequently, they seek to follow this divine vision regardless of the consequences and hardships that may befall them. It is their responsibility to know and be familiar with the times in which they live, and seek for guidance from the Lord regarding what their people must do (1 Chronicles 12:32).

The pastor also exercises stewardship in the congregation, which consists of people with unique gifts for the expansion of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16). This task balances the priestly side of the pastoral role, for without this engaging of members in ministry, he can, himself, assume too much ministry (Johnson, 1995). The biblical pattern then, for the roles and functions of the pastor is relatively simple: a Spirit-filled man who gives oversight, shepherding, guidance, teaching, and warning, doing all with a heart of love, comfort, and compassion (Stitzinger, 1995).

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The church's role in contemporary society arises from Biblical principles founded on divine commands. There is frequent confusion and ambiguity when it comes to the primary role of the church, which can often be attributed to what are currently labeled as culture and societal trends.

Throughout the Bible, many commands are given to the people of God regarding their roles and duties to one another as well as to others beyond their community. Jesus tells his disciples to love one another (John 13:34); to describe the scope of this love, Paul said to do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10); serve one another (Galatians 5:13); carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2); have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7); accept one another (Romans 15:7); be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:32); learn and share their lives together (Acts 2:41-47); build each other up (1 Thessalonians 4:18); and so on.

Based on the above commands, Grace Communion International (GCI) summarizes six distinct functions of the church, which can be a very useful reference in classifying and summing up the various roles of every follower of Christ, both as individuals and as a collective body:

Worship

When the congregation worships, the people declare who God is and why He is worthy of praise. Worship can be done both privately and publicly through prayers, songs, hymns, and even routine daily activities. People are called to declare God's praises (1 Peter 2:9), and to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). Above all, it is important to offer praise not just outwardly, but most of all inwardly, with a worshipping heart.

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines include prayer and study (GCI, 1999), and can refer to those activities that "disciple" us and help us to learn about God. This hunger for the knowledge of God involves a person's whole being and should take root from a personal desire to know the Creator.

Discipleship

The main strength of discipleship is that of teaching others and helping them to walk in faith. It is an integral part of the Great Commission (Matthew 29:19-20), and is reiterated in Colossians 3:16, "Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." In Paul's words to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2), it is clear that every Christian – not just the church leaders or the pastors – must learn from one another and teach the basic foundations of faith.

Fellowship

Fellowship refers to a mutually loving relationship among Christians. It can be exercised through meetings and gatherings, church activities, etc., but actually involves a deeper connection that springs from sharing lives (Acts 2:41-47); serving one another (Galatians 5:13); carrying each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2); accepting one another (Romans 15:7); being kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32); building each other up (1 Thessalonians 4:18); and so on. As the members of Christ's body support one another, they are strengthened in faith and become capable of drawing others to Jesus as well.

Service

In this context, service is emphasized as a physical activity, which includes addressing even the physical and material needs of those who are in want. Paul says that service should be done within the church (Galatians 6:10). Spiritual gifts can also be used to address such needs, in which case, the service will be done for the body, by the body, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Evangelism

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel," Jesus commanded in Mark 16:15. It is not a matter of choice for the church whether or not they ought to spread the Good News; it is a command, and must be followed. The church, like the pastor, must have a burden in her heart to spread the gospel of salvation to those who have not yet heard it. Many times, this could mean enduring great hardship and suffering for the purpose of carrying out God's work on earth.

CONCLUSION

Pastoral ministry has evolved greatly through the passing of time, however, it remains to be what it is: God's continuing work on earth. It is essential for Christians to go back to the Bible whenever there is confusion regarding what should be allowed or prohibited, admonished or encouraged in the church. They must also guard themselves, when they do turn to Scripture for wisdom, from the danger of proof-texting and misinterpretation. Along with the pursuit of knowledge -- in spite of it being spiritual -- the people of God should prioritize prayer when handling such conflicting views.

The application of this personal philosophy is not dependent on whether I pursue pastoral work in the ministry; it has been relevant to my Christian walk from the moment I became part of the universal church. As mentioned in this paper, ministry does not confine itself within the limits of the pastoral office; it is a charge to every single member of the congregation and does not belittle any task, whether significant or mundane, as long as it is done in the love and service of God. In line with this, church leaders must take great care in guarding themselves against spiritual pride and self-praise. No one is holier than anyone else in the church; we are not even able to call out to God of our own volition (Romans 3:9-12).

In this light, we see that pastoral ministry cannot ever be brought to completion if it were only up to human effort. God's continuing work on earth is exactly that -- God's work. People are but instruments through which He manifests His love and grace, which has been fulfilled in the very person of Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection is the core and foundation of the message that we preach.

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