

THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

My particular ministry calling is that of pastor. It is a calling which involves a number of responsibilities and privileges. Interestingly, this term which is heard most often and with which people are most familiar is only used once in the New Testament with reference to a church office. It is found in Ephesians. Other terms found in the New Testament that denote the office are elder and bishop.

In Ephesian 4:11 Paul writes, “And He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Some scholars feel the passage should be translated “pastor-teachers” i.e. rather than viewing them as separate offices they should be viewed as one. This means that one of my primary responsibilities as pastor is the teaching of God’s word to God’s people. This carries with it a number of implications.

Paul writes to his son in the ministry, Pastor Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) Therefore, I am not only responsible for teaching the word of God, but I am expected to be a life-long student of the word of God. (cf. Titus 1:9) As an old pastor told me when I first accepted my calling into the ministry, “Son, always remember, you can’t teach what you don’t know, and you can’t lead where you don’t go.” In fact, one of the requirements for an elder is that he be “apt to teach.” (1 Timothy 3:2) I am to “Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” (1 Timothy 4:13) In the New Testament the related verb *poimaino* is used to describe elders in Paul’s speech to the elders at Ephesus. (Acts 20:28)

The term means “act as a shepherd” or to “act as a pastor”... He tells them to ‘shepherd the church of God’..., and in the same sentence he referred to God’s people as ‘all the flock,’ using another related noun (Gk. *poimnion*) which means ‘a flock of sheep.’ So Paul directly charges these Ephesian elders to act as shepherds or ‘pastors.’¹

This passage, along with some others, contains a profound analogy. The pastoral calling is compared to that of being a shepherd. It is a metaphor also used of Jesus. Christ is the good Shepherd. (John 10:11) He is the model for pastoral leadership. He has given to the body men and women who will shepherd His sheep. (Jer. 3:15)

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter uses the term elder (*presbyteroi*) in a way that helps us better understand the shepherding responsibility. In 1 Peter 5:2 the elders are told to “feed the flock.” Peter’s instructions to “the elders which are among you” states that these men and women, who are to “feed the flock,” must first have been “partakers of the glory that shall be revealed.” (1 Pet. 5:1) Therefore a pastor must first have accepted the call to discipleship before he can accept the call to pastoral leadership. Pastors are chosen by God (Jer. 3:15). They are responsible to “feed the flock of God” to whom they have been sent (“which is among you”). (1 Pet. 5:2) “Feeding the flock” (to *tend* as a shepherd²) implies more than just teaching, but also nurturing. Therefore as

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 913.

²Strong, James: *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996, S. H8674

pastor I am responsible for nurturing or caring for the sheep. An important aspect of this is to have some mechanism in place, in the churches ministry to its members, which helps members discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts. My goal is to help each member mature in Christ. (Eph. 4:13-16).

The pastor is to exercise oversight. Mine is the privilege of pastoral authority. I am the leader i.e. the person God holds responsible for the sheep. This is clearly seen in Revelations chapters two and three. The letters to the seven churches are addressed to the “angel” i.e. pastor or messenger of each church. As leader, I should not lord it over God’s sheep, but I must not shy away from my leadership responsibilities because one day I “must give account.” (1 Pet. 5:3; Heb. 13:17)

The pastor must always remember that the flock is not really his, but the Lord’s. Salvation is of the Lord. (Jon. 2:9) He is the one who adds to His church. (Acts 2:47; Matt. 16:18) I am to do the work of an evangelist. (2 Tim. 4:5) Christ is the chief shepherd. (1 Pet. 5:4) He purchased His flock with His own blood. (Acts 20:28) Therefore, I am to shepherd the flock assigned to me “not by constraint” i.e. or compulsion, but “willingly” or with a willing heart. A pastor who loves God, and the flock to whom he has been assigned, is not motivated by money, but by a genuine love for the sheep. (1 Pet. 5:2, 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

The word overseer (*episkopos*), translated in the King James Version as Bishop, is also used to describe the office of the pastor. Based on the instructions in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9, to the best of my ability with the aid of the Holy Spirit, I am to set a godly example. As Paul instructed Timothy, “be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (1 Tim. 4:12) My living should speak as loud as my preaching. Therefore, self-discipline and humility are pastoral necessities. As Paul put it, I must “keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Cor. 9:27)

The call to pastor is a great privilege, but it also carries with it great responsibility. I have been charged to “make full proof of thy ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:5) I take confidence in the fact that what God has called me to do He has also equipped me to do. (1 Cor. 12:11) It is a great privilege to be called of God to shepherd His sheep. Therefore, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.” (1 Tim. 1:12) In the end I want to be found faithful. I want to be able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7) I want to hear the chief shepherd say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” (Matt. 25:21)