

Pastors

“And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

Jeremiah 3:15

When we think about the role of pastors, we likely think of preachers. We associate preaching the gospel to the duty of a pastor. Certainly, preaching the word is part of a pastor's responsibility. However, the Lord's promise to Israel as recorded in Jeremiah 3, to send pastors, suggests there is more to pastoring than delivering a weekly sermon to a congregation.

According to our text pastors are a gift. God gives to men the gift of pastorship and He gives pastors to His church. That God gives men the gift of pastorship is supported by Paul's statement to the Church at Ephesus. **“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers....” (Ephesians 4:11)** The gift of pastor is a sort of spiritual aptitude for understanding the needs of God's local churches plus an abundant measure of love and compassion for addressing their needs.

As the text indicates, God gives pastors to churches: **“And I will give you pastors.”** He gives pastors whose desire is to serve the local church according to God's will as indicated by the phrase **“according to mine heart.”** The Apostle Peter teaches pastors feeding the flock by serving according to God's will includes oversight as God's under-shepherds to those God sends them to serve. **“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” (I Peter 5:2-3)** Peter's direction to elders to **“feed the flock of God”** is the same instruction he received from Christ to feed God's lambs and sheep and is also consistent with the promise God made Israel. **(John 21:15-17, Jeremiah 3:15)** Pastors are to serve willingly, with a ready mind. This means their service is based upon a desire to serve God, by doing His will. They are not to serve by constraint; that is, not force themselves on a church nor be forced by a church to serve. Neither are financial considerations to influence their service; whether to accept a churches' call or else remain at a church based on favorable financial arrangements. Jesus' instruction to Peter suggests the proper motive for pastoring a church is love. Each time the Savior commanded Peter to feed his lambs and sheep he preceded the commandment with the question, “lovest thou me.”

Pastoral oversight of the flock is a God given authority. It is not however, haughty, privileged, oppressive nor authoritarian leadership. The local church is God's heritage, His kingdom. He alone is in charge. Pastors oversee by providing instruction and example according to God's word, the Bible and under the leadership of the Spirit. Furthermore, they are to be **"ensamples to the flock."** In his pastoral letter Apostle Paul instructed the Church at Corinth to **"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."** (I Corinthians 4:16) Pastors' understanding for instruction and example comes from the instructions and examples of Christ as revealed in His word. They seek specific direction directly from God as to what lessons the church needs thru prayer, study and meditation. As workmen in God's moral vineyard they are commanded to apply themselves in study of His word so they can instruct the church in the ways of Christ. **"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."** (II Timothy 2:14-15)

While pastoral oversight is by example as pastors follow Christ, it is leadership. Pastors are given authority from God to lead the local churches they serve. In **Hebrews 13:7** we are instructed, **"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."** The word "remember" in the text carries the idea of acknowledging or giving heed to one in authority. In his Commentary of the Hebrew Letter, John Gill expounds how pastors are to rule according to this text. *"Christ's church is a kingdom, and he is King in it; pastors of churches are subordinate governors; who rule well when they rule not in an arbitrary way, according to their own wills, but according to the laws of Christ, with all faithfulness, prudence, and diligence."* Christ's example at Calvary is the standard for sacrifice and compassion to which pastors are committed in caring for churches. Simply stated a pastor is supposed to love the church, both the institution and the local congregation, even as Christ loves His church. This means a pastor is willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of the church. The Apostle Paul expressed his willingness to be offered up in service and sacrifice in his pastoral letter to the Philippians. **"Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all."** (Philippians 2:17) Paul's love for Christ and also for the brothers and sisters at Philippi together with his desire to serve God by ministering to the saints in this church was so great he counted it a joyous event if he should die while serving their needs.

The fellowship between a pastor and the church the Lord has called him to serve is a special relationship. Paul and John liken it to a loving

father with his children. In the Galatian Letter, even in reproving the church for embracing false teachings, Paul refers to the membership as “my little children.” In **1 John 2:1 and 3:18** John refers to the saints with similar language. Paul goes even further with the metaphor of fatherhood by referring to the conversions of saints under the influence of his ministry as begetting. In the Letter to Philemon he refers to Onesimus as his son **“whom I have begotten in my bonds.” (Philemon 1:10)** He also acknowledged the same bond with members of the church at Corinth. **“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (I Corinthians 4:15)** Of course we understand Paul to mean he had a special tie to these saints who experienced gospel conversion under the influence of his teaching. This language demonstrates the great affection Paul had toward those he fed with spiritual food of knowledge and understanding.

Scripture indicates the bond of loving affection between a pastor and his congregation is mutual. In the Letter to the Philippians Paul alludes to the love between pastors and churches by referencing the high regard the members of Philippi church have for both he and Epaphroditus, a minister of the gospel from Philippi who became gravely ill while ministering to Paul in Rome. **“Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.” (Philippians 2:25-28)** A picture of mutual love between pastor and church is presented in Paul’s language. Epaphroditus showed love for his congregation in sorrowing over their sorrow for his grave illness. The church’s love for Epaphroditus is demonstrated by their sorrow when they learned he was seriously ill. This is how fellowship of love between a church and her pastor is supposed to be.

Another example of the principle of shared love between a church and pastor is found in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. In this instance Paul is loving the church, but not all her members have loving attitudes and behaviors toward Paul. He begins by recalling a time when this church had great love for him as manifested by a spirit of selfless service and sacrifice in their willingness to follow his leadership. **“And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if**

it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” (Galatians 4:14-15) However, Paul wrote the Galatian letter during a time when his fellowship with this church was strained. Some had embraced false teachings. They had strayed from Paul’s teaching and in doing so developed hostile attitudes toward him, even thinking Paul their enemy rather than one for whom they would pluck out their own eyes. **“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16)** Their hostility was resulted from Paul identifying their errors and urging them to return to Christ by returning to the doctrine he originally taught them. Because Paul loved the Lord and His church as God’s under-shepherd he would not, could not, seek favor from the members of the Church at Galatia by ignoring the problem. This is the example for pastors. They may not change the message of Christ to appease some who may oppose what they teach, even if it means those who once loved them and gladly followed their teaching now consider them an enemy.

In the Hebrew letter we learn there is grief when church members do not by faith follow the godly teachings and leadership of their pastors. **“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17)** When church members do not submit to the authority of faithful pastors by embracing and applying the lessons pastors’ teach they do not simply reject the leadership of the man. They also reject the leadership of God because it is He who sends pastors. He sends them to feed His sheep thru the gospel with lessons and messages He directs according to the churches’ specific needs. While this is a serious offence against God that is **“unprofitable for you,”** it also produces great sorrow for both the ones who refuse to be fed and for the pastor. The immediate impact of rejecting pastoral leadership is failure to act by faith and thereby loss of an opportunity for spiritual growth. This certainly is unprofitable. There is no increase or strengthening of faith because it is not exercised, and there is no subsequent growth in the knowledge of Christ Jesus because in rejecting the form and counsel of God’s servant we also reject God.

Pastors also experience grief when members do not follow their leadership because as God’s under-shepherds they grieve for the suffering of members’ souls that are cast down by the burden of sin. They also grieve with the knowledge that errant members will surely experience God’s chastening. They sorrow for Christ’s sake; because Christ sorrows when we go astray. There is also another source of sorrow for the pastor. He must give account to God for the spiritual well-being of all whom the Lord entrusts him to lead. A pastor’s sorrow

for those who neglect or else reject his counsel and instruction is more intense and painful because of the weight of responsibility and the special father-like love for those he serves, which the Lord gives a man when he calls him to pastor a church. He sorrows more deeply because he must give account to God for his pastorship and feels a great weight of responsibility and personal failure when church members refuse to faithfully follow him as he follows Christ.

What then may a pastor do if some will not follow; or, in a more dire situation the church is at a standstill, not growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus as the pattern of scripture teaches faithful churches do grow? He must first take the matter to the Lord. He must ask for wisdom to examine himself, his ministering, to be sure he is loving the church enough, providing a good example to the flock and declaring to the church the whole counsel of God thru the gospel. He must initiate correction in himself to walk more closely and better follow Christ to provide a better example to the church. He must pray for wisdom and direction from God to show him opportunities to prudently, with patience and longsuffering, help members who are struggling. He must with humility and kindness address his concerns to the church. He must lead the church in seeking answers from God. In doing so, the Lord has promised the church will be fed and her members together have spiritual growth as pastor and church with singleness of purpose **“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14)**; which is to their profit and joy in serving the Lord.

In hope,
Brother Mike Ivey