

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 27, Number 38

October 16, 2011



Who "Calls" a Pastor?

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28, KJV 1900)

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 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. (1 Peter 5:1-3, KJV 1900)

We have spent significant time in our present study of the New Testament church dealing with her ministers and with the conduct the Lord commands His people to practice in His church. Let's focus our thoughts this week on how a man should become a pastor. When a church finds herself without a pastor, should she set up a corral that contains all the unattached preachers in the region and run them through their pulpit to see which one wins the winsome popularity contest? Sadly, this seems to be more the accepted practice than not. Talk about getting the cart before the horse.

A prevailing practice in some regions is that the church holds an annual election for its pastor. I've often wondered as I observed this practice; do these folks really believe that the Lord assigns preachers to His churches on an annual contract? Or do they believe that the Lord assigns pastors at all? Perhaps they believe this whole business of pastoring results from their popularity contest and who gets the majority of votes in the election. I fear that churches, like people, sometimes drift into unhealthy attitudes and practices without thinking about them deeply. "That is the way we've always done it" may explain a practice, but Scripture, not old habits, should direct a church's actions.

...over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers. This simple statement goes to the heart of our question and answers it decisively. The Holy Spirit calls men to preach the gospel, and He assigns them to His choice for their field of ministry.

Let me give you a personal example. I felt a strong conviction to preach at age 14. Though I felt too young and inexperienced to consider doing anything about my convictions, my pastor asked me to speak briefly to the church during that year, and my convictions were so pressing that I consented. As I started speaking regularly, I realized an insatiable hunger for the Scriptures. I literally squeezed every spare moment I could find to read and to study my Bible. Early in this process, I studied Paul's letter to the Romans. Of course, I relished his teachings on God's eternal purpose and saving work for and in His people. Election,

predestination (Biblical predestination), and the final resurrection thrilled my heart. One morning before school I was reading in the later chapters of Romans. As I read the words in Romans 15:20, I felt as if God slapped me with a thunderbolt.

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: (Romans 15:20, KJV 1900)

...lest I should build upon another man's foundation. My uncle was a highly respected minister in the area, and there was apparently an unspoken idea among many of the church folks in the region that I would follow in his footsteps, perhaps even in his pastorate as he became unable to continue. The thought that hit me so hard that morning was shocking to my young mind. I knew as clearly at that moment as I ever knew anything that the Lord had a place for me somewhere else. It was several years before I moved, reluctantly at the time to be honest, to the state of California.

At several crucial times of my ministry, the outcome has clearly appeared as the Lord's intervention and direction, not my convenient choices. As I write this piece, I have spent over fifty-five years in the ministry, all of them except the first six in California. I often revisit that moment a young fourteen year-old boy felt the foundations of his life shaken to the core. I live today with the conviction that grew out of that experience. If I honor the Lord who called me, I must live with the understanding that He, not I, directs the course of my ministry. I believe that principle applies to a "senior" preacher seventy years of age no less than to a young man in his beginning.

The Holy Spirit assigns a man to his field of labor. What should be a church's attitude toward the role of pastor? How should they pursue the issue? How should they decide? The first step should be a constant attitude and an equally constant action in every church.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.
(Matthew 9:38, KJV 1900)

Whether a church seeks a pastor to fill a vacancy or they have a pastor whom they believe is there for life, every faithful church should constantly pray for the Lord to call and to send men into His field of labor and harvest. Do not miss the point. We do not choose and send men; we pray to the “Lord of the harvest” that He send laborers of His choice. Jesus affirms the truth that we see in Acts 20:28. Scripture is always consistent in its teachings. Do not overlook the role of the laborer. The field belongs to the “Lord of the harvest,” not to the laborer. The laborer’s job is to labor in **the Lord’s harvest**, not create the Lord’s crop. Every church needs to pray this prayer every time it gathers for worship and fellowship.

Extending this point, a church without a pastor needs to devote its heart and time to intense and continuing prayer for the Lord to direct them to the man whom He would have to serve them as pastor. Likewise, preachers should constantly pray for the Lord to direct them to the field of labor where He would have them minister.

...taking the oversight thereof. The Lord calls a man to be an overseer. No man can preach, truly oversee, people unless the Lord has called him to that work. However, this passage informs the men whom the Lord has called regarding how they are to fulfill that oversight—and as well how not to go about it. When a preacher fails, either in the eyes of the people or, even when the people approve, in the eyes of the Lord, God is not responsible for the failure. A church can also fail to listen and heed a man’s preaching and thereby bring spiritual ruin upon itself. We see sad examples of this problem in the first three chapters of Revelation, and, for that matter, in each of the New Testament letters to the various churches to whom those letters were sent.

Failure also occurs when a preacher fails to “take the oversight thereof” according to the inspired behaviors that Peter addresses in the passage. Follow them closely.

1. *...not by constraint, but willingly.* In my youth, I occasionally heard preachers talk about their initial realization of the Lord’s calling. At times they almost boasted about how they resisted God’s calling. More sadly, they almost boasted about the sinful behaviors they indulged in their “Jonah” efforts to run from their calling, seemingly never realizing that the only student who attended “Jonah school” flunked out. Read the last chapter of Jonah. The man who ran from God ends up pouting and mad at God, hardly the honor role for a God-honoring ministry. The man who preached the charge when I was ordained, Elder Gene Thomas, delighted me when he told me his

personal experience that began his ministry. He felt the conviction to preach, a wise older brother asked him about it, and he acknowledged his conviction. Shortly thereafter, he started speaking, and the Lord blessed. That example mirrors the passage’s admonition, “...willingly.” As willingness marks a man’s beginning, it should mark every step throughout his ministry.

2. *...not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.* The driving force behind a man’s ministry should not be money, the point of the passage, or anything else that enhances his personal gain. To the extent that a man is motivated in ministry by anything of personal gain to that extent he has violated this teaching. Such a man has forgotten that he labors in the Lord’s harvest, not his own, and that his ministry is a stewardship, a trust given to him by the Lord of the harvest. The man’s ministry never becomes his personal possession. To the day he dies or leaves his charge, the godly preacher/pastor labors with the conscious awareness that he serves others in a field that belongs to his Lord.
3. *...Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.* On a few occasions I have observed pastors who literally acted as if they were a church’s lord and master. Given the clarity of this passage, we should not be surprised to see such sinful attitudes producing disastrous results. How could we expect any other outcome? The role of Lord for a New Testament church is occupied, and the Lord who occupies it views His role with godly jealousy. He frowns on any who attempt to replace or supplant Him in His lordship over His church. **As ministers of the gospel, we must lead by example, or we do not lead Biblically at all.**

As clearly as this rule applies to preachers, it equally applies to every man who occupies a position, officially or unofficially, of leadership or influence in a New Testament church.

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.
(Mark 9:35, KJV 1900)

In the midst of a heated discussion regarding who would lead the disciples after Jesus’ exit, our Lord confronts the disciples with this lesson. Do you want to lead people in the Lord’s church? If you wish to do so in a godly, Biblical manner, you have one choice. Put yourself “...last of all, and servant of all.” **Lead by godly example, or do not lead at all.**

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor