

January 29th, 2017

—The Church—

THE MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH PT. 1

Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 11:1-2

This is the third week in our series on the church. In week one we looked at the meaning and marks of the church. The church is not a building. The true church is the whole people of God, that is, the elect, from the beginning of time until the second coming; those whom Jesus Christ has purchased out of the world with His own blood. The church is the bride of Christ. That's why God created the universe—so that His Son might have a spouse.

Last week we looked at the mission of the church. Out of all the institutions on planet earth, it is only the church that is sent on mission to answer the supreme crisis that every human being faces, namely, how can ruined sinners dwell in the presence of the Living and Holy God? The church's mission is to answer that question by proclaiming the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and making disciples of all nations. Yes the church is commanded to do other things. But if we adopt a different mission, we lose the one thing that makes our mission distinctly Christian

Why are there pastors?

This week we are looking at the ministers of the church. Which may be a little misleading, because in one sense, all of us are ministers—we are all supposed to be doing the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). What I mean by ministers is pastors, or elders. Deacons are also ministers (or officers) of the church. However I preached a message on deacons last year so I would point you to that. Dear congregation, we need more pastors. This little flock needs more shepherds to help care for God's precious lambs. And so this week and God-willing next week we will be looking closely at the office of an elder.

The question I want to ask is: *why are there pastors?* Why did God *give* pastors to the church? Let's look at Ephesians 4. v. 11 says "And he [Christ—v.

7] *gave* the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.” So Christ *gave* the church all these gifts — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Why? For what purpose? To what end? v.12 “...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for* building up the body of Christ,” Many of us would put the period there. What do pastors *exist*? Why did Christ *give* them to the church? *So* they could equip the saints through teaching and preaching, and counseling the Word *in order* that the body of Christ would be built up. But if we put the period there, we must ask: “built up *for what*?”

How tragic to answer that question in a circle — pastors exist to equip the saints — *to do* the work of the ministry, *so* that they are built up, *so* that they can do more work of the ministry. Is that why pastors are building up the body of Christ? So that the saints can *merely* do more ministry? Is that why the Apostle Paul say to the Corinthians “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls”? (2 Cor. 12:15), so that he could make more worker bees? No. That is why the period does not belong at the end of v.12. Let’s look again. Starting in v.11

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 **until** [*Paul is going to tell us what pastors are laboring for*] **we all attain** to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,**

Do you see? Christ gave pastors (v.11) so that through the ministry of the Word (v.12) the saints would all attain (end of v.13) *to* the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.¹ In other words, our ministry does not end until the

¹ All three of these clauses in v.13 show us that this ministry lasts until death. First, Paul says this ministry through men will last “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” The faith that we are to be unified in is faith in the Son of God Jesus Christ. Certainly there is a measure of unity now, but it will not come perfectly till paradise. Secondly, Paul says this ministry through men will last “until we all attain to...mature manhood.” Believers are counted perfect in Christ now because Christ’s righteousness, but we won’t be perfect in our sanctification until heaven. Lastly, Paul says this ministry through men will last “until we all attain to...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

saints are brought into the full maturity of Jesus Christ. That is the goal of pastoral ministry: that every member of the church is conformed into the likeness of Him. **That's why pastors exist**—so that through gospel-proclaiming-disciple-making ministry, the saints would be *prepared* for her wedding feast with the Son of God. We can see this very clearly in three places.

2 Corinthians 11:1-2 “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! **2** For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed² you to one husband, to **present** you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** *that* he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** *so that* he might **present** the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Revelation 19:7 “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and **his Bride has made herself ready**;

Pastors are instruments in the hands of Jesus Christ that He uses to make His bride ready for the wedding feast. That's why pastors exist.

The Big Idea...

Pastors have been Divinely called so that through the preaching of the gospel, the church would be made ready for Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb

² <http://messianicfellowship.50webs.com/wedding.html>

☆ The Constitution of a Pastor

☆ The Calling of a Pastor

I. The Constitution of a Pastor

Bishop, Presbyter, Overseer, Elder, Pastor, Shepherd

Throughout the history of the church there has been confusion regarding the office of a pastor. That confusion exists in our day as well. Is a pastor different than an elder, or a bishop, or an overseer? So where do we find our answer? In the Scripture. And what we find is that the apostles used all those terms: bishop, presbyter, overseer, elder, pastor, shepherd interchangeable. Meaning, all of them point to the same office. [Please turn to Acts 20]

In his farewell speech, beginning in v.17, Paul called upon the Ephesian **elders** (πρεσβύτερος presbyteros³—where we get the word presbyter). Just a few verses later, in v.28 he addressed them as **overseers** (ἐπίσκοπος episkopos). Episkopos is where we get the word bishop. But look closely at v.28. Paul says “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the **flock**, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to care** for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” Notice he uses the language of flock. And he charged these elders (end of the verse) “to care (ποιμάίνω poimainō⁴) for the church of God.”⁵ Other translations use the word *shepherd* (NASB). The task of an overseer was the same task as a shepherd. That’s why some English translations (NASB) use the word *pastor* in Ephesians 4:11 instead of shepherd. Pastor is just the latinized form of shepherd. So in one place the Apostle, makes all these terms:

³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/act/20/1/t_conc_1038017

⁴ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4165&t=KJV>

⁵ It is no accident that Paul’s charge was the same as Jesus’s charge to Peter (who was also an elder—1 Peter 5:1) in John 21:15-17

Bishop, Presbyter, Overseer, Elder, Pastor, and Shepherd point to the same office. An elder is a bishop. A pastor is an elder. An overseer is a presbyter.⁶

From this it follows that there are only two offices that exist within the local church: the office of deacon, and the office of elder or pastor.

The dignity and work of this office

My question then, is why does the N.T. use these different terms? If an elder is the same thing as an overseer or pastor, then why not just use the same word? The answer is that these words point to different aspects of the same office.

First, the word *elder* points to the dignity of the office.⁷ “Elder” literally means older man. But what is it about older men, generally speaking, that is attractive to this office? Their **wisdom**. An elder needs to be **wise** first and foremost.⁸ Age is not the essential thing. Wisdom is. Timothy was a young man, appointed as an elder by the Apostle Paul—he told Timothy “Let no one despise you for your *youth*...” (1 Timothy 4:12) Being filled with wisdom is a sign of being full of the Holy Spirit of God. In Acts 6, the apostles instructed the congregation to choose men as deacons who were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” Wisdom is the essential thing.⁹

⁶ We see this in other places as well. In Philippians 1:1, Paul greets the Philippian church by saying “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers (ἐπίσκοπος episkopos) and deacons.” By using the word episkopos, Paul was greeting all the elders or pastors. Lastly we see in Titus 1:5, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders (πρεσβύτερος presbyteros), and then in v.7 he calls those elders—overseers or (ἐπίσκοπος episkopos—bishops).

⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 5: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, (Bellingham, WA.: Hexham Press, 2016), pg. 56

⁸ Some older men are not wise.

⁹ The Reformed Heritage KJV Study Bible notes: “The Lord indicated to Moses that Joshua was the man qualified to lead Israel. But the only quality He underlined was that Joshua had the Spirit in him (Numbers 27:18). When a man has the Spirit of God filling him he will have everything required to ministered. Spirit-filled men are always the need of the hour (Acts 6:3).” The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), pg.238 Also cf. pg. 1256 for the prophet Amos’ heritage

Secondly, the word overseer or pastor points to the *work* of the office. What does a shepherd do? He feeds, he leads, and he protects. First, a good shepherd *feeds* the sheep. He removes rocks from his field, sowing seed so his sheep can eat. Likewise a pastor must feed the flock the word of God. If pastors are not feeding their flock with God's word, they will develop no taste for Christ. How will the she be prepared to meet Him at the wedding supper of the Lamb? This was Jesus' first and last charge to Peter "Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep." (**John 21:15, 17**) Secondly, a shepherd must *lead* his sheep. Often a shepherd has to lead his flock for great distances in order to find green meadows. Likewise, pastors must constantly lead the sheep back to Christ. As sheep, all of us tend to be fence crawlers. We are looking for that opening in the fence. The backslider, the doubter, the deceived, the anxious, the sorrowful, the sick, the idolater, all need to be led back constantly to the green pastures of the gospel.¹⁰ Thirdly, a shepherd must *protect* his sheep. Sheep are the vulnerable animal on the planet. Shepherds must be on constant watch, even at night so their lambs will not be slaughtered. Likewise pastors are charged with protecting the sheep against false teachers. Paul told his precious lambs in **Acts 20:29-30** "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock...speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Therefore, that is why we see different terms for pastor in the N.T. *Elder* points to the wisdom needed; and *overseer* or *pastor* points to the work that needs to be done: feeding, leading, and protecting.

The unity and diversity this office

However there does exist both an equality and a distinction within this office. The **equality** is seen in that God has ordained that *elders*—plural—are responsible for overseeing the church. Nowhere in the N.T. do you see one

¹⁰ As the Psalmist says "He *leads* me beside still waters...He *leads* me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (**Psalm 23:2-3**)

elder ruling from the position of a superior office over another.¹¹ Instead you see the care of each local church overseen by a plurality of elders.

In **Acts 14:23**, Paul and Barnabas appointed *elders* in every church. (Meaning every church had a plurality of elders governing it)

In **Acts 16:4**, we specifically are told about the *elders* in Jerusalem

In **1 Peter 5:1**, Peter exhorted the *elders* among them

In **Titus 1:5**, Titus was commanded to appoint *elders* in every town.¹²

Now why does this matter? Why is important to uphold the plurality of elders? First because this is what God commanded. And we are not at liberty to do otherwise. But second, because men are sinful. Ambition is a dangerous disease in the church. When men exercise lordship over each other, Christ's headship over the church is obscured. Whenever the Pope or the evangelical CEO pastor holds the reins of the church, the gospel is obscured.¹³ A healthy church is one that recognizes that their eldership must be a plurality in which no man is lord over another.¹⁴

¹¹ Granted we see Apostles who were also elders (1 Peter 5:1) exercising an authority that some might see as "over" an ordinary elder. If that is the case, I would just respond by saying that the Apostles were not *mere* elders, they were charged by Christ himself with establishing the church.

¹² Also see Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 20:17, 28; 21:18; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; James 5:14; Peter 5:5

¹³ Brakel says here that "all supremacy and the lording of the one over the other in the church... is nothing other than a remaining claw of the beast, and a remaining vice by which the antichrist has ascended the throne." Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 115

¹⁴ As Wilhelmus A Brakel says "All ministers are of the same rank. The one is not inferior in his office to the other. As equals they must work together in all things." Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 117

There is however, a **distinction** within this office. Reformed churches generally recognize a difference between ruling elders and teaching elders. You can see this distinction in **1 Timothy 5:17**. [Please turn there] “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, *especially* those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Notice the word *especially*. It separates elders who rule well from those who additionally labor at preaching and teaching. Both classes are elders charged with equally governing the church. But not all elders are gifted the same way. All elders are required to be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), meaning they must feed the flock on some level, in discipleship, in counseling etc.¹⁵ However not all elders are to labor in preaching and teaching. Why? Because not all elders are gifted the same way. There is a diversity of gifts even on an elder board, and we should honor that, because God is the one who has done it.¹⁶ This is an important distinction for us to make because if you are expecting all of our future elders to look the same, you will be disappointed. It is not essential that all elders have the gift of preaching in order for them to be an elder.¹⁷

II. The Calling of a Pastor

The Divine Call

Nobody has the right to enter into the office of a pastor without being called by God. God sovereignly rules over the eldership of a church just as

¹⁵ “Still, it seems to us that one derives too much from the data if one argues that all the elders were not free to be active in teaching in the congregation. On this follows with certainty: there were a number of elders who had the specific duty to teach. The others may have had the freedom; they did not have the duty.” Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 5: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, (Bellingham, WA.: Hexham Press, 2016), pg. 56

¹⁶ Even if a particular congregation resists the ruling/teaching elder distinction, most would practice it this way because the gifting (and consequently laboring) would manifest it. Natural law aligns with Scripture.

¹⁷ “Teaching is, no doubt, the duty of all pastors; but to maintain sound doctrine requires a talent for interpreting Scripture, and a man may be a teacher who is not qualified to preach.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 280

much as he rules over our salvation. God condemns the false prophets of old who called themselves into the ministry. **Jeremiah 23:21** “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. [v.32] Behold, I am against those who...I did not send...or charge...they do not profit this people at all, declares the Lord.”

False teachers and leaders who have not been called are very damaging to the church. Paul says that they “lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene...they [upset] the faith of some.” (2 **Timothy 2:16-18**)

A pastor/elder must be called by God.¹⁸ As one author noted “Pastors possess a *distinct calling* from others in the body of Christ.”¹⁹ This doesn't mean that other callings are less necessary. Not at all, Paul says “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?” (1 **Corinthians 12:17**) The church is a body, and if you check out, we limp around like we are missing a leg. But pastors are “...distinctly called to proclaim, explain, and apply the living Word of God (1 Tim. 4:2).”²⁰ Pastors are distinctly called to the ministry of the word and prayer (Acts 6:4). This call is seen several places.

First Paul says it is Jesus who **gave** pastors to the church: **Ephesians 4:11** And he **gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,²¹

¹⁸ Hebrews 5:4 “And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.”

¹⁹ Jason Helopoulos, *The New Pastor's Handbook: Help and Encouragement For the First Years of Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2015), pg.26

²⁰ *ibid*, pg. 27

²¹ **Romans 10:15** “And how are they to preach unless they are **sent**?” “Preaching requires a divine *sending*, without which no one can lawfully preach...the ministry cannot be performed without the will and sending of our Lord and Father.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 3, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1997), pg. 211

Next Paul says it is the Holy Spirit who Himself **made** overseers: **Acts 20:28** “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has **made** you overseers,”

Lastly, Paul tells us that God sent them as ambassadors: **2 Corinthians 5:20** “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” Nobody can call themselves ambassadors unless they are sent by their prince.²²

Over and over again Paul and the other apostles at the beginning of their epistles are claiming that God has sent them. And then they in turn commission others to carry on the work (Acts 14:23). So the question is, how do we as a church determine whom God has called? God calls pastors through the means of the church in their 1) internal calling; through the church’s 2) external calling; and through the pastor’s 3) formal calling.²³

The Internal Call

By internal calling, we mean that there is a tugging at the heart for this work. Sometimes people think that this includes some extraordinary sign from God, but I believe this is very rarely the case. An internal calling would certainly include a knowledge of the work. Can you teach the lost soul the way of salvation? Can you comfort, and rebuke, and stir hearts? Do you live a life that is worthy of imitation? An internal calling must include a singular love for Jesus Christ, and a zealous desire to make Him know. It would include a sacrificial self-denying love for the church—to strengthen her and comfort her

²² Paul also refers to pastors as servants and stewards (1 Cor. 4:1) “And yet no one takes this office to himself, except he whom the father of the family and the master of the house has appointed; and “soldiers of Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3) “who ought to perform the duties of gerbils and leaders in this service, which is not lawful for them to do without a call from the heavenly commander.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 3*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1997), pg. 211

²³ “God calls ordinary ministers of the church mediately.” Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 5: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, (Bellingham, WA.,: Hexham Press, 2016), pg. 68

with the precious Word of God. This is the most difficult calling I know. I don't know any pastor who hasn't dreamed of doing something else. Moses²⁴, Jeremiah²⁵, and Jonah all wanted to do something else. The internal calling is often mixed with fear and doubt. Many times Monica and I have wrestled with the difficulty of being a pastor. And the way I answer those times is, "I believe I would be disobedient if I walked away." So perhaps the question is, given the gifts that God has given you, would you be obedient if you were to do something else? You must feel a burden for this, because if not, when things get difficult, and they most certainly will, you will not make it. **1 Timothy 3:1** says "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."

The External Call

An internal call is not enough—many men (especially young men) desire this office because they see the prestige that comes with it. They mistake the internal call of God for the call of their fleshly hearts. So there must also be an external call. This is the part the congregation plays. In the book of Acts we see the congregation consulted on the choice of its leaders. In **Acts 1:15-26**, the 120 men chose two men to replace Judas, and then drew lots to see which one the Lord chose. In **Acts 6:3** the apostles told the congregation to choose "... seven men were of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom" that they could appoint as deacons. The Biblical pattern is that the congregation is consulted for

²⁴ Exodus 4:10 But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."

²⁵ Jeremiah 20:14-18 Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! 15 Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you," making him very glad. 16 Let that man be like the cities that the Lord overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, 17 because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. 18 Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

the choice of their pastors.²⁶ The Scripture provides the whole church the qualifications for elders and deacons so that they know what to look for. So the question is, does the church recognize that gifts and qualifications in you for the ministry? Have people in the congregation profited from your ministry? Is there fruit?²⁷ This is one of the ways the elders can know that their internal calling is for real. Do the people of God recognize these things in me or no?

The Formal Call

Last is the formal call. Meaning, the existing elders of the local church are finally responsible for appointing the man. The weight of appointing elders fell to Titus, also a fellow elder in **Titus 1:5**, Paul said “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” The same is true in **Acts 6:6**, after the congregation put forward the men, it fell to the Apostles to give their final approval. Timothy, the young pastor was appointed as an elder by the council of elders who laid their hands upon him (**1 Timothy 4:14**). It was Paul and Barnabas who appointed elders in every city in **Acts 14:23**.

That is the three fold calling of an elder—the internal call, the external call, and the formal call. These three elements must be present in the case of appointing elders to the church. It is not enough to feel called, if nobody else agrees. Likewise popularity will not suffice if a man is not gifted nor lacks the tugging on his heart from God.²⁸

²⁶ Acts 14:23 seems to demand strong congregational involvement. How does Paul and the other apostles lay hands on men and appoint them as elders in every city—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch without the congregation informing them of what men are qualified? How would they know what men are qualified?

²⁷ Much helped in this section by Jason Helopoulos, *The New Pastor's Handbook: Help and Encouragement For the First Years of Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2015), pg.30

²⁸ That the church will not always get this right does not prove that men aren't really called through this process. “There must be divisions among you...” (1 Cor. 11:19) Judas was called to be an apostle, and this served a purpose. The effect of our shortcomings shouldn't make us doubt the process, but rather should make us all the more dependent upon Christ, as the true head of the church.

Application

Our Doctrine: Christ is the Only Head and King of the Church

There are two extremes that the church can fall when it comes to thinking about it's ministers. The first extreme is **ministerial absolutism**. This is Rome's error. They see the clergy of the church to be absolute in power. The Pope being the vicar of Christ, acting as the mediator between the church and God. He has usurped Christ's headship over the church, and acts as lord over the individual's conscience demanding absolute obedience to his interpretation of Scripture. Not this is easy for reformed Christians to reject. However there is a practical absolutism that evangelicals can be guilty of. I know I've been guilty of it. It's when we hold one pastor up as the answer to all our problems. When we see him as having all the right answers or all the right affections, or all the right counseling, or all the right preaching. Of course the problem is not with the pastor at this point, it is with our own hearts. If your hope is on any one *mere* man to be the answer to your problems you are pursuing disappointment. There is only one ideal pastor. His name is Jesus Christ. He doesn't share the throne. One of the reasons God placed a plurality of elders in the local church, is so that no one man would lord his authority over a congregation thus obscuring the glory of Christ.

The second extreme that the church can fall into is **ministerial egalitarianism**. This was an error of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. They overestimated the idea of the priesthood of all believers and essentially nullified the office of the pastor. There is no pastor. We are all pastors. Again, I think we can reject this error but be guilty of it practically. Meaning we don't really put any stock in the office of a pastor. He's just a talking head. I can search the Scripture for myself, I have the Holy Spirit, I have a concordance and books, I don't *really need* a pastor. He's for those weaker people. I don't follow a man, I follow Christ. This extreme is born in pride. Who is the One that determined the the gospel would be preached by men? Who is the One that determined that pastors should care for the church? We

fight against Christ when we belittle the office that He ordained for the care of the church. Jesus gave the church pastors to equip the saints, to build up the body of Christ, until we have reached His fullness. Calvin said “to neglect this ministry, and hope to become perfect in Christ is utter madness.”²⁹

Both of these extremes war against Christ being the Only Head and King of the Church.

That’s our doctrine: Christ is the Only Head and King of the Church. Because of that, here is our duty:

Our Duty: “Remember *your* leaders”

“Remember *your* leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.” (Hebrews 13:7) Emphasis on *your*: There was an article published a couple of years ago entitled “God Doesn’t Want Matt Chandler To Be Your Pastor.”³⁰ Matt Chandler is a popular pastor down in Texas. Thousands listen to his podcast. The article basically warned the church against engaging in pastor porn. Meaning—with the wealth of good preaching and pastors out there, we could be very tempted to be discontent with our own pastors, and desire others instead. “If only my pastors were like John Piper, or Matt Chandler, or fill in the blank.” But God doesn’t want those men to be your pastors. He wants the men of your local church to be your pastors. These are the men that know you, that share your problems with you, that will visit you in the hospital when you are sick, that will rebuke you when you are in sin, that will encourage you when you are broken hearted. Podcast pastors cannot do that. Remember *your* leaders, the Scripture says.

Whoever your next elders are, they will not be names of renown. They will not be John Piper. They will be ordinary. They will have flaws. They will sin. We will disappoint you at times, I promise. The three-fold process of

²⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 282

³⁰ <https://theblazingcenter.com/2015/03/god-doesnt-want-matt-chandler-to-be-your-pastor.html>

calling is not infallible. We've seen that here at the Well. We have had elders disagree, sharply, and leave. And we might be tempted to say "wow, something is *really* wrong." Dear congregation, that is normal. That is par for the course. In the book of 1 Timothy, *the* pastoral book, the Apostle Paul shows us this is normal. In the very first chapter, Paul addresses Timothy about the problems he is facing in leadership (1:3-7, 18-20) In chapter four, he circles back to the issue and promises more problems (4:1-4). In chapter five, he instructs Timothy on how to deal with elders who are sinning (5:20-22). In chapter six, he revisits the same theme again (6:2-10). I don't know of any churches who have not faced serious issues in their eldership. Jonathan Edwards was fired from his pastorate. I quote Acts 14:22 frequently here from the pulpit: "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Do you know the context of that verse? It was when Paul and Barnabas were appointing elders. **Eldership is a tribulation.** And the main reason for this is because the best of all pastors are still the worst of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) If you were to put the best pastor next to Adolf Hitler, what would the Bible would conclude? That both men—pastor and Hitler—would need the exact same amount of God's grace, the exact same amount of Christ's blood, and the same amount of Christ's righteousness to get into heaven. Dear congregation do you see what a *grace of God* that is? A pastor's failures are on display for all to see, so that we could continue to remember that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His mercy that He has saved us (Titus 3:6). A pastor's failures are on display for all to see, so that we would remember if it were up to any mere man, we would go to hell. Jesus Christ alone is our Redeemer.

That's our duty: Remember *your* leaders. Don't be seduced by pastor porn. Remember that God shapes every tribulation, even in eldership, so that we will continue to look towards His gospel as our only hope of rescue. Here's our delight:

Our Delight: Jesus Christ gave you pastors to make you ready for Him

Please turn again to **2 Corinthians 11:1-2**. I began this message by asking “Why do pastors exist?” We answered in our big idea: Pastors have been Divinely called so that through the preaching of the gospel, the church would be made ready for Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:1-2 “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! **2** For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” Two parts to v.2, the betrothal and the presentation. Jewish betrothals are very unique.³¹ A man and a woman pledge themselves to each other in ceremony. They are legally bound together but it is not consummated. For a period of a year, they go back to their own homes and prepare for the day of the wedding. The man is charged with preparing a home for his wife, planning, gathering materials, and building. And the woman is charged with purifying herself and sewing her wedding dress. And these preparations last until, finally the woman is presented to her husband.

As a pastor, Paul betrothed the Corinthian church to Christ. He preached to the the gospel of free grace—‘Corinthians...the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God...you must be washed in Christ’s precious blood, you must be clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness...I beg you, be reconciled to God... believe the gospel, repent of your sins.’ And they believed. God sent them Paul to betroth them to Him. But it doesn’t end there. Paul was looking forward to the presentation. v.2 says “I betrothed you to one husband, **to** [meaning-for the purpose of] present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” Paul’s work only began when he betrothed the Corinthians. Now he was in the life long work of preparing them to meet Christ at the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

Dear congregation, this is the gift God has given us in pastors! Not because there is anything inherently special in them. But rather because of what they’ve been charged with. What is their ministry? The ministry of the word

³¹ <http://messianicfellowship.50webs.com/wedding.html>

and prayer. It is those two things that Christ has charged pastors with to make his bride ready for Him. Faithful pastors who have been called of God pray for their congregations. They plead with God, asking Him to form Christ in them. That's their chief concern. 'Yes Lord, heal that disease, yes Lord, help their broken heart, but above all Lord, do what it takes to form Christ in them.'

Additionally faithful pastors have been called to open up the Word of God to their congregations. Do you realize what the Word of God does to the human soul? When the gospel is proclaimed, it is the power of God unto salvation. It is means by which God rips you out of the kingdom of darkness and from the power of the devil, and brings you into His marvelous light. When the gospel is preached chains are broken, faith is strengthened, souls are purified, the worst of sins are washed as white as snow, strongholds are defeated, holiness is birthed, repentance is granted. Preaching the word produces the greatest transformations, and deliverances, and joys in the universe. That's how Christ is preparing you for Himself. His gifts to us never cease. His betrothal is one the first step. Through the church, through the ministry of the Word, He continues to purify us, for the day when we will be presented to Him as a pure virgin.