

What To Look For In A Church: Right Leadership

Introduction

Good evening, I'm thankful for the opportunity to be here tonight. Ed approached me a few months ago and asked if I could do a three-part series during the next three Sunday evenings, and one of the first things that came to mind was that we have several new members and some visitors and regular non-members as well. I've been in that kind of situation before quite frequently, what with moving around in the military and all, and it has always struck me that there is a surprising lack of teaching and resources available to the average person on how to handle that. So the series I want to do over the next three weeks covers the question of "What to Look For in a Church", and I have three aims for what I hope will be beneficial in this series.

First, I hope this provides those who are new to our church some solid ground on which to guide or confirm their decision and to encourage them to church membership if you haven't done so already. Second, not only for those who are new to the church, but also to all of us as a good reminder of some things that we can use to do some self-assessment of our church body as a whole as well.

But there one more goal I have for this series. And in order to understand that, you need to understand that there are a ton of churches in the area that are either ignorant of what the Bible says about churches, or they're just lax / fearful of driving people away, or, and this is what I suspect is most of these churches, they would actually deny the things we're going to go over. Now, each of us interacts with people in those churches almost every day. Maybe you work with some of the people in these churches, maybe you're friends with some of them, maybe they're even some of your relatives. And you need to realize that they're not getting what they need to be nourished spiritually, and in some cases they're not even getting what they need to know in order to be saved.

And so the third goal I hope for this series is that it will give you some Biblical tools to talk to people that are in these churches that know that something is wrong with where they're at, and even invite them here where at least the truth of the Bible is made paramount in obedience to Christ. In other words, I hope you can use this series to launch a rescue mission.

Almost exactly one year ago today, I was just beginning to teach through our Introduction to Church History class, and towards the beginning I offered a description of what constitutes a solid, Biblical, Godly church. I posited that a good church has three characteristics: Right Leadership, Right Doctrine, and Right Practice. What I want to do over the next three Sunday evenings is expand on each of those, and show how the Bible exposit those as fundamental tenets of a church that pleases God. So we'll take one of those each week, and tonight we'll start with Right Leadership.

Like most doctrines, today's church is rife with outrageous error on the subject of church leadership. There are two main fights going on right now that most churches are losing: first is the CEO model versus servant leadership. No less than heretic Andy Stanley has said this about church leadership. He was asked should we stop referring to pastors as shepherds, and he responded,

“Absolutely. That word needs to go away. Jesus talked about shepherds because there was one over there in a pasture he could point to. But to bring in that imagery today and say, “Pastor, you’re the shepherd of the flock,” no. I’ve never seen a flock. I’ve never spent five minutes with a shepherd. It was culturally relevant in the time of Jesus, but it’s not culturally relevant any more.”

He goes on to say, “One of the criticisms I get is “Your church is so corporate.” . . . Bloggers complain, “The pastor’s like a CEO.” And I say, “OK, you’re right. Now, why is that a bad model?””

So that’s one major area in the fight for Biblical church leadership. The other is an area called “egalitarianism”. There is a movement that has emerged out of liberal feminism called egalitarianism, and that movement asserts that women can and should be affirmed into pastoral leadership over churches just as much as men should. That error represents a rejection of the Bible’s teaching on the role of women as the primary caretakers in the home, wives having their primary ministry in the home, and as a result there has been a shocking rise of just abysmal female “teachers” like Rachel Held-Evans, Jory Micah, Sarah Young, Priscilla Shrier, and the Queen Maven of unsound doctrine, Beth Moore. To all those I say along with John MacArthur, “Go home.”

But those are the two major areas at stake in today’s church when it comes to church leadership, and so we want to look tonight at what the Bible says about leaders in churches.

Leadership is a tricky thing to understand. It seems natural that there is a “two sides of the coin” effect with the ideas of leaders and followers. On one side of the coin, you have leaders; on the other side, you have followers. That makes sense, doesn’t it? But there is a thought that has developed today that because of that partnership between leaders and followers, then there is equal weight and emphasis on both leaders and followers. For example, I know of one pastor that I highly recommend who, whenever anyone brings up issues with the state of leadership in the Church today, he will always turn around and point to the followers as the root of the problem.

I don’t think that’s quite accurate. I think the Bible puts a premium on leadership as having the responsibility to lead a local church, and whenever you see a church that goes astray, yes, the followers bear some responsibility for that, but I think that ultimately the burden and root of the issues lies with leadership. Let me give you just a couple texts that I think illustrate this.

First, in Hebrews 13:17, Christians are commanded to “Obey your leaders and submit to them—for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. . .” Pastors and leaders in the church will give an account not just of themselves, but also of the flock they pastor. Think of it this way: when a pastor stands before the Lord, imagine the Lord saying, “I gave you a charge to keep watch over Bob’s soul in your church, and yet Bob persisted in a life of sin. Did you do anything to address it? Did you follow my command to preach the Word? Did you warn him? Did you even know of his life of sin?” And there are many pastors today who will be able to do nothing but hang their heads in shame, because they did not keep watch over the souls of their flock, and so they will fail that account when they stand before the Lord.

Another text that shows an emphasis on leadership is found in Ephesians 4:11–12. Paul writes, “And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evange-

lists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. . .” Here we see that saints are to be equipped for “the work of service” which is defined as “the building up of the body of Christ”, but notice how this equipping is accomplished. It is accomplished through the work of, among others, “pastors and teachers”. And notice that pastors and teachers are singled out as being gifts that have been given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

So the Bible does in fact put a premium on leadership within the church, and the first thing to note for any particular church is the state of their leadership. So what are we to make of leadership within the church? Is there any Biblical guidance available to us for how to judge church leadership? Does the Bible say anything to us about what church leadership looks like, who should be a church leader, and what do church leaders do?

And of course, the answer is yes. The Bible says a great deal about leadership, and so tonight we’re going to examine that.

Biblical Eldership

One of the best, most comprehensive volumes on the subject of church leadership is Alexander Strauch’s *Biblical Eldership*. It’s the best resource I can recommend today, and it’s not even close. In it, Strauch expositis every single passage in the Bible that touches on leadership in the church, and one of the main topics he addresses is that of elder qualifications. Who is qualified to be a pastor in a church? Let’s look at those briefly before we get into our passage for tonight:

Spirit-Given Motivation for the Task

The first qualification we find in Scripture is what is often termed a “pastoral calling”. We often say that a man who wishes to be a pastor must be “called” by God. I think Strauch articulates it better by pointing to 1 Timothy 3:1 and identifying this call as a “spirit-given motivation for the task”. In other words, God doesn’t call pastors the same way as He did Old Testament prophets, for example. Rather, God gives men a desire and a burden to accomplish the task of elder, and part of working at the task includes being recognized in the office of pastor. We don’t have time to exposit through 1 Timothy 3:1 completely, but I can safely say that what Paul has in view here when he writes “If a man desires the office of elder, he desires a noble thing,” is that the desire is for the task, not the status. And so the first qualification is that a man who would lead a church must have a burden for serving the Lord in that way.

Exemplary Character Qualities

The next set of qualifications we find in both 1 Timothy 3 and the parallel passage in Titus 1 is that leaders in the church must possess exemplary character qualities. That is, they must be of impeccable moral character such that they reflect God’s holiness and do not bring dishonor upon the Lord or the church. And just looking at these lists for a moment, we see that the first, over-arching qualification is to be “above reproach”. The idea of being above reproach functions in two ways: it acts as a general catch-all to describe someone of

impeccable character, and it also acts as an umbrella term to capture all the rest of the character qualities that follow in these passages. The idea of above reproach means that there's not always something going on with a leader, there's not any unresolved issues, and that any issue must be fully examined and understood before rendering a leader unfit for office.

Following that over-arching qualification, Paul gives us a familiar list of moral imperatives that should describe the manner of life of a church leader. In 1 Timothy 3, he is to be a one-woman man, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not a drunkard, not violent or argumentative, considerate, peaceable, not greedy. He is to manage his own household as an indication of fitness for leadership position. He must be mature in faith. He must possess a good reputation with outsiders. Then, in Titus 1, we see a similar list, and Paul includes a prohibition against being quick-tempered, and a requirement to love what is good, to be righteous and holy.

Now, I would love to take several weeks and exposit through each of these words, but what I want to highlight two things about these lists. First, both of these lists of pastoral qualifications are written in the present-tense. Meaning, they are qualities that a man must possess *now*. A man, twenty years ago in his youth, may not have met these qualifications, and that doesn't matter. The issue is how is he living his life now? Second, don't think for a moment that just because this is a list for qualifications of pastor that this list doesn't apply to you. We're going to see that in a moment, but suffice to say that the reason these character attributes are listed is so that the man of God will be qualified for leadership, and then we, as those who submit to leadership, will be able to watch those qualities lived out in his life and then develop and emulate them in us! In other words, if you want to know what being self-controlled looks like, what being peaceable looks, what being righteous looks like, examine the lives of your leaders and imitate them in those things.

Made Skillful for the Job

The final category of qualification that Strauch makes is to highlight that a pastor is to be gifted for the job. Specifically, the pastor is to have the ability to teach sound doctrine in accordance with God's Word and explain and apply the Scriptures to the flock so that they will know and understand what God's prescriptions, precepts, principles, and prohibitions are and how to live those out in our lives. Both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 include a requirement to "be able to teach", and Titus 1 further explains that one of the reasons for this is to be able to refute false teaching and "reprove those who contradict" it. Not everyone is a teacher, and those that are teachers and leaders in a church are held to a higher standard (James 3:1), and so Paul lays that out as a requirement for leadership in the church.

1 Peter 5:1–3

So, all of that is introduction, and we could weeks just poring over all of those things, but I want now to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. What is going on with all of these things, how do they fit into the larger design that God has for building His Church? And the key question is this: What is it that elders are supposed to do? What should we expect elders to do in the performance of their job? That's really where the rubber meets

the road, because this is where right leadership is distinguished from bad leadership.

Alexander Strauch points out several sweeping phrases that describe what elders are expected to do as the leaders of the church. Using Biblical descriptions, He points out that elders are to feed the flock. Elders are to preach the Word. Elders are to guard the flock. Elders are to lead the flock. We might expect elders to conduct some sort of visitation or ministry to those who are chronically ill in the congregation. All these things are things we might consider as part of the job description of pastor.

But there is one passage that I find in Scripture that really sums up the totality of pastoral ministry. All other functions or ministry imperatives we find in Scripture can really be fit under this one particular command we find in this passage. And that is Peter's command in 1 Peter 5:1-4 to "shepherd the flock." So turn with me there now and we're going to spend the rest of the time expositing our way through this passage to see the essence of what Right Leadership will look like in a church.

Let me read through 1 Pet. 5:1-4. Peter writes:

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

We see first in this passage that this is an apostolic exhortation. But first notice that Peter identifies himself as "your fellow elder". Peter was an apostle. In fact, he wasn't just a run-of-the-mill journeyman apostle. Peter was one of the foremost apostles. Paul describes Peter in Galatians 2 as being one of three apostles who were "pillars" in the early church. Peter was among the first apostles to spread the gospel to non-Jews, recalling the story of Cornelius. And yet, here is Peter, lowering himself from the status of apostle, and exhorting his readers as a "fellow elder". So from the get-go, Peter displays incredible humility.

He then shows that same humility is to be expected of all elders. What is his exhortation? "Shepherd the flock of God *among* you." It's not the flock of God *under* you. It's not the flock of God which you command. Shepherds are to be *among* their flock. So, here is our first lesson on church leadership: Peter has lowered himself from an apostle to a fellow elder, and then he has taken all the other elders along with himself, and lowered everyone to be on the same level as the rest of the flock.

I can recall the exact moment at which I made up my mind to become a member here. Ed was teaching through a series on Sunday nights, and one night he said, "I am just a sheep along with the rest of you." Immediately I thought of this passage, and that was the first time I've ever heard a pastor publicly say that. I was already satisfied with the church's doctrine, and I wasn't aware of any shenanigans going on inside the church, but when Ed said that, I thought, "He gets it, and that's someone I should submit to." And so I'm thankful for Ed and Brett as elders who get this.

Now, let's look at this exhortation: Peter writes, "shepherd the flock of God." This is the umbrella term that describes everything a pastor is to do in his service to the church.

Everything a pastor does, whether that's preaching, whether that's visitation, whether that's praying and counselling, whether that's enacting church discipline, whether that's correcting error or protecting the church from false teaching, or whether that's administrating the church, all of those things are part of the shepherding tasks that fall under Peter's exhortation here. The Greek word Peter uses is *poimaino*, which is the verb form of the word "shepherd". What is a shepherd? Someone who tends sheep. What does a shepherd do? Looks after the sheep? What does that mean?

It means everything. Now, you might think of modern sheep-herding in terms of sheep-dogs nipping around the sheep to corral them into place. Or maybe you think of sheep as just docile creatures who you put into the fenced pasture and let them graze all day. But that's not what Peter meant. In Peter's time, a shepherd was everything to the sheep. Sheep are dumb, essentially helpless animals. They need looking after. There weren't any fenced pastures that the shepherd just dumps the sheep off into and then goes away. The shepherd was constantly there with his sheep. If a wild animal tried to make off with one of the sheep, the shepherd killed the intruder or drove it away. If one of the sheep was hurt, maybe a broken leg or something, the shepherd would bind the wound and then carry the sheep on his shoulders until the sheep could walk again. The shepherd would walk in front of his sheep, and the sheep would follow the sound of his voice. They were actually voice-imprinted on the individual shepherd. The shepherd would walk and find good, safe, plentiful grassy areas where the sheep could be fed and watered. The shepherd would lead the sheep back to the community sheep pen and stand in the gate. He would lower his rod to block the sheep from rushing into the sheep pen all at once, and instead they would pass under his rod one-by-one so he could examine each sheep for wounds, to make sure they were nourished, etc. Sheep have really oily wool, it's called lanolin, and that wool gets matted in their hindquarters when the sheep use the bathroom. It gets caked up in there and the sheep get blocked up, so the shepherd would reach up into the sheep's hindquarters and clean out the sheep's mess from when it used the bathroom. All of those things are involved in shepherding.

Now consider this: if you're here tonight and you're a Christian, you're a sheep. And when Peter exhorts elders to shepherd the flock of God, that implies that you need to be shepherded. It means that if you're not being shepherded, then you're a sheep without a shepherd. And the way that you fix that is to place yourself in the care of a team of pastors who will be responsible for feeding you from God's Word, for protecting you from the ravenous wolves like the Andy Stanley's and Beth Moore's that are out there, who will bind up your wounds and bring you spiritual healing and counsel, and who will whack you on the head with the rod of God's Word and bring you back when you need whacking.

That's the idea that Peter has in "shepherding" here. But notice that Peter gives us three descriptions as to how the elders are to shepherd the flock: it is to be done willingly, with eagerness, and as an example. And so let's look at each of those.

Willingly

The first way in which Peter indicates an elder is to shepherd the flock is that it is to be done *willingly*. The word used here is *hekousios*, which literally means "willingly, of one's own accord, spontaneously". This indicates that elders should be shepherding out of the overflow of their heart, and not in a begrudging manner.

Notice that Peter provides us with some clarification: he writes that elders should be “not under compulsion”. The word here is derived from the Greek word *anagke*, which literally means “a bent/uplifted arm poised to meet a pressing need.” This means that Peter is specifically prohibiting a church from having elders just for the sake of having elders; the elders must meet the qualifications of the office, and if the desire is just to instill someone into an office in order to fulfill some requirement or perceived need, then it is better that the person not be an elder than rush into the thing and have bad leadership.

Eagerness

The next way that Peter stipulates as to the role of a shepherd is that they are to serve with *eagerness*. The word here is *prothumos*, which means “passion shown in advance, i.e., pre-inclined, “thoroughly willing””. It’s interesting that Peter contrasts this with “shameful gain”. When Peter cites that trait, he is referring to a greedy spirit that is eager for base gain. In other words, if an elder is shown to be eager for his office only after the possibility of a paycheck presents itself, then that is an abuse. An elder should have already demonstrated a willing and cheerful eagerness to shepherd a flock prior to and without the possibility of receiving any type of compensation or recognition.

Examples

The final way that Peter exhorts shepherds to behave is to be *examples*. This is perhaps the most interesting of the three. The word is *tupos*, which means “a model forged by repetition”. It comes from the idea of a wax stamp struck by a die. Figuratively, the idea is to be “a reliable precedent for others to then follow”.

Peter contrasts this thought by writing that shepherds should not be *domineering*. The word, *katakuriuo*, literally means to “exercise decisive control as an owner with full jurisdiction.” This specifically prohibits the “CEO” model of the pastorate that we see plaguing so many churches today.

The most profound idea, however, is the way in which Peter relates the shepherd to the flock: he describes the flock as being “those in your charge”. It’s unfortunate that our modern translations have missed the idea being communicated here; the KJV has it right. It reads, “Neither as being lords over *God’s heritage*”. Wow! A shepherd isn’t to view the flock as something to be in charge of, but the flock that elders are supposed to shepherd is to be viewed as God’s own inheritance that He purchased with His own blood by His own sovereign grace!

So we see that rather than today’s traditional model of one man being in charge, that elders are to shepherd the local church in such a way as to model the very life of Christ before us, so that we too may know how to grow up into His image.

Conclusion