

A THEOLOGY OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

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Introduction

A theology of pastoral ministry serves as the foundation and direction for sound doctrine in the church. If sound doctrine is neglected in pastoral ministry, it becomes hazardous for the church and for those who embrace faith in Christ Jesus. This underscores the significance of sound theology. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine what the Bible says about various topics related to pastoral ministry.

The Calling to Pastoral Ministry

The call to pastoral ministry is a holy call from God. God has graciously called and ordained overseers over His church- some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and others as pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines calling as “God’s summons or invitation to individuals to follow His will.”¹ It is crucial to bear in mind that God has called everyone to do His will. Moreover, there is a mandate to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to observe all that Christ has commanded (Matt 28:18-20). There are specific callings and general callings. For instance, the Apostles devoted themselves to the preaching and teaching ministry without dividing their energy into other tasks (Acts 6:4); this is an example of a specific calling. On the other hand, we are all called to be holy; this is an example of a general calling. Consequently, the pastoral calling is a specific calling of God. The purpose of God’s calling to pastoral ministry is to build his church and advance his kingdom (Eph. 4:12).

The Church

The term church is derived from the Greek word *ἐκκλησία*, *ekklēsia*’ which means the community of believers. The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines the church as “Followers of Christ who derived their identity and mission from Jesus and understood themselves to be the true eschatological community of God.”²

Jesus announces to Peter for the first time that he is going to build his church upon him, and the gates of hell will not prevail (Matt. 16:18-19). In the early years of Christianity, Jesus lifted Apostle Peter as the leading shepherd of His church. The term ‘church’ is also interchangeably used for the community of believers (1 Pet. 3:14-15; Acts 20:28). The church is not purely a physical structure, it is a community of believers, individually purchased by Christ’s blood. The purpose of the church is multifaceted: it is a place of worship of God, a place of teaching and fellowship, a place for evangelism, and ultimately a place and gathering that glorifies God. That is why we are exhorted not to forsake gathering together in the name of Christ (Heb.10:24-25).

The Office of the Pastor

The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary defines a pastor as “A leader of a church that cares for people and their spiritual needs like a shepherd would care for the physical needs of

¹ Barry, John D, ed. “Calling.” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

² Barry, John D, ed. “Church.” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

sheep.”³ In John 21:16, we read Jesus commanding Peter to shepherd the flock, from which the verb and noun ‘pastor’ is derived, meaning shepherd in Latin. The qualifications to hold the position of a pastor are outlined in the Book of Timothy: above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to preach, not addicted to wine, gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money, who can manage his household, and not a new convert (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

The primary responsibility of a shepherd is to ensure that the congregation is fueled with knowledge and insight of God (Jer. 3:15). Pastors are also called to exhort the congregation, exercising oversight, not by compulsion, but out of willingness (1 Pet. 5:1-5). The office of a pastor represents the kingdom of God and Christ himself. Jesus is the good shepherd, likewise, pastors are called to carry His mission to the end of the earth (John 10; Acts 1:8). Essentially, the objective of a pastor is to lead the people of God in godliness by teaching them the Word of God, loving them, encouraging them, leading them, and exhorting them by example. (1 Pet. 5:3; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 13:7)

The Office of a Deacon

The term 'deacon' is derived from the Greek word “διάκονος”, which translates to the servant, waiting man, or minister. Deacons are responsible for serving the church by caring about the needs and the livelihood of the believers. The qualifications for deacons mirror those of pastors. Here are the qualifications for deacons: dignified, sincere, not devoted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, faithful to wife, managing the household well, not slanderer, sober-minded, and husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:8-13). In essence, deacons are called to a higher standard, exhibiting an exemplary lifestyle.

The deacons are called to serve the body of Christ in diverse roles, collaborating with pastoral leadership to ensure the well-being of the body of Christ. This office was instituted to lighten the load of those called to preach and teach (Acts 6:1-6). The purpose of this office is to serve the church and the leadership to advance the kingdom of God (1 Tim. 3:13). They are to be ordained in agreement with the church, as exemplified in the book of Acts (Acts 6:6).

Preaching

According to the Lexham Bible Dictionary, preaching is defined as “The act of proclaiming a theological message. Generally involves the conveyance of some truth related to God or Scripture with inherent significance to the audience for whom the act is being done.”⁴ Preaching aims to edify the church and propagate the gospel to the world.

In the Old Testament, we can discover a diverse formation of preaching, such as messages of joy or sometimes messages of destruction. Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah were commissioned by God to convey certain messages to His people (Isa. 6:9; Jer. 1:6-10; Ex. 19; Deut. 31-33). Preaching continues even in the New Testament; we see John the Baptist preaching the message of repentance, declaring a message from God (Luke 3:3-15). Following John the Baptist’s arrest, Jesus initiated his preaching ministry (Mark 1:14-15), and in the Apostolic age, the apostles persisted in preaching the message of God (Acts 2:14-36; Acts 17:22-31). The

³ Fuller, Andrew, Jessica Parks, and Cory Taylor. “Pastor.” *The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.

⁴ Barry, John D, ed. “Preaching.” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

purpose of preaching is exposed in multiple dimensions: to call people to repentance (Acts 2:38), establish a firm Biblical foundation (2 Tim. 4:2), guide others to the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 9:22b), and ultimately to glorify Christ (1 Cor. 2:2).

Ordination

Ordination represents a formal process of appointing individuals to ministerial office in service of God's church. We can observe instances of ordination in the Old Testament, such as when Moses anoints Aaron as a priest, or Samuel anoints David as the next king of Israel (Ex. 29:22, 26, 27, 31, 34; Lev. 7:37, 8:22; 1 Sam. 16:1-13). We also discover ordination in the New Testament, though distinct in the ordination process compared to the Old Testament. Here ordination takes place through the laying on of hands, along with prayer and fasting, seeking the approval and direction of the church (Acts 6:6; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

In essence, ordination is the process of recognizing and appointing individuals, in agreement with the church, in the service of God. Needless to say, the one who is being ordained must be a Christian whose calling has been duly confirmed by the church.

The Ordinances

Ordinances are ritual actions undertaken by the church to visually represent the divine grace of an invisible God.⁵ One of the ordinances is Baptism, which is rooted in the practices of John the Baptist, who baptized the baptism of repentance, in preparation for the Messiah (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20). Additionally, Jesus reiterates the command for baptism in his great commission to the apostles (Matt. 28:18-20), and as exemplified in the apostolic practices documented in Acts, signifying admission to the church (Acts 2:38). Apostle Paul, in his letters, spotlights baptism as a common ground in the faith and oneness with God. He cautions the church that this ordinance is unable to provide salvation, however, it is a symbolic representation of spiritual rebirth (Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 10:1-10). Baptism becomes a symbolic expression of death, burial, and resurrection with Christ (Rom. 6), where one publicly declares allegiance to God.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper stands as another integral ordinance that was inaugurated by Jesus. This ordinance consists of breaking the bread, symbolizing his body, and drinking from the cup, symbolizing his blood; the disciples were commanded to partake in remembrance of Him (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14: 22-25; Luke 22: 14-23; John 6). Apostle Paul further instructs the church on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:14-22). While there is no specific command on who should perform these ordinances, the pastor of the church is the most suitable person for these tasks. One participates in the ordinances to remember and meditate on the work of Christ and consequently lead a profound life that is grounded in the inexhaustible mercies of God.

Pastoral Visitation and Evangelism

Pastoral visitation is one of the important tasks of a pastor. A pastor demonstrates care by visiting the sick, offering encouragement to the despondent, reaching out to the elderly, comforting those grieving loss, or preaching to those who have strayed (Acts 20:28; Rom. 12:4-21; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 13:7). The purpose of pastoral visitation is to exhort and provide encouragement, alongside deacons in the church.

Evangelism, on the other hand, is an act of announcement of good news. For Christians, the good news revolves around the person of Jesus Christ: birth, life, crucifixion, and

⁵ Barry, John D, ed. "Ordinances." *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

resurrection(1 Cor. 2:1-5). Evangelism is an integral part of the Christian faith, which is why, it is a collective responsibility of all believers to proclaim the message of hope in Christ. In particular, a pastor should preach the gospel (Matt. 28:18-19; 1 Pet.3:15; Rom. 10: 14-15). The overarching purpose of evangelism is to guide people to the knowledge and conviction of God, fostering repentance and surrender to the kingdom of God (2 Cor. 5:20).

The Pastor's Family and Ministry Priorities

An essential qualification for an overseer is the ability to manage his household (1 Tim. 3:4). The pastor should be able to lead his family in discipline and instructions (Eph. 6:4). Consequently, the pastor's first ministry is to his family, showcasing his capability and willingness to serve God by teaching his household (Josh. 24:15; 1 Pet. 5:3). This, in turn, positions him to lead the church adeptly, effectively maintaining order within the church as he has achieved in his family. A pastor should not neglect the care of the family, and vice versa.

It's not a choice between one or the other; it commences with the family and extends harmoniously to the church. In *The Gospel Coalition*, Daniel Stegeman aptly notes, "The health and success of the churches and our families are linked. Family life is significantly important to the well-being of the church. If families are not healthy and vibrant, the church will not be healthy and vibrant. It is crucial and even necessary for pastors and leaders to set an example in this regard."⁶

Servant Leadership

Christian leadership must be marked by humility and service to others, as commanded by Jesus to His disciples. The defining trait of a servant leader is his attitude of servitude (Matt. 20:26; Mark 9:35). In stark contrast to the leadership of the world, Jesus serves as the ultimate example of what servant leadership should embody (Phil. 2:5-11). Just as Jesus relinquished His life and divine privileges, a pastor or a Christian is also called to serve God's people with comparable humility (Phil. 2:3). A servant leader demonstrates an outstanding quality in leading the flock by being gentle and lowly, just as Christ (Phil. 2:1-3).

The Pastor's Spiritual Life and Example

Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to lead a life of servitude to Jesus, consistently being nourished in the words of faith and sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4: 6). A pastor must set an example of a godly man in the church characterized by love for people, faithful to family, obedience to God, and a character marked by uprightness and holiness. Reflecting on the instructions to Timothy, a pastor must be a model in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity for those who believe (1 Tim. 4:11- 14).

Furthermore, a pastor must also lead a life of prayer, engage deeply in the study of the scripture, care for the needy, foster spiritual gifts, grow in the spiritual disciplines, and live a life of worship and dedication to God (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 4:13, James 1:27; Ps. 34:1; Col. 2:6-7).

Conclusion

A pastor functions as a shepherd, attending to the needs of the flock. He sets a profound example of godliness within the church by diligently observing the commands of God and teaching the Word to the believers. It is not an ordinary office, it is the office that is ordained

⁶ Stegeman, Dan. "The Pastor and His Family." *The Gospel Coalition | Canada*. Last modified June 9, 2020. Accessed February 25, 2024. <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-pastor-and-his-family/>.

from heaven. Moreover, pastors must bear in mind that God will judge the works and measure their faithfulness (James 3:1). Consequently, pastors must be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted them. They are called to serve others, lead their families in godliness, evangelize in the community, demonstrate financial stewardship, exhibit servant leadership, and ultimately wholeheartedly obey the Lord. Ultimately, a pastor should live for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).