PASTORAL APPLICATION PAPER

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A Paper

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by

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### Introduction

*The Book of Pastoral Rule* was written by St. Gregory the Great in AD 590 during the early years of his service as Pope. St. Gregory was born into a family of great power and prestige in the Roman Empire. Two of his ancestors had served as Pope and his family’s position in Rome gave him ready access to power. He served as the prefect of Rome; however, he resigned the position at the age of thirty-four, sold his inherited real estate, and converted his Roman estate into a monastery. He chose to serve God as an ordinary monk and did so for five years. Pope Pelagius II sought him out, ordained him as a deacon of the church, and sent him to serve as the church’s representative to the Emperor of Constantinople. His political experience served the people of Rome well and he was able to speak to the Emperor about papal issues. Gregory served in this role for seven years and then returned to Rom at the age of forty-six to serve as an abbot. When Pope Pelagius II died, St. Gregory was elected to serve as Pope at the age of fifty-one. St. Gregory served as an influential and effective Pope until his death at age sixty-five in AD 604.

This paper will highlight six different aspects of pastoral ministry which St. Gregory discusses in his book *The Book of Pastoral Rule* and will consider how those concepts pertain to current-day ministry.

### Qualities Needed to Assume Spiritual Leadership

Gregory begins his book by describing qualities which should be evident in a person who seeks to become a pastor of others. This first section covers ten specific qualifications that Gregory recommends be part of a pastor’s makeup. Two of these qualities were particularly interesting to me: the capacity to bravely face adversity and still reject the lure of prosperity, and the ability to live in a manner that inspires others while maintaining the primary desire for solitude with God rather than cherishing fame.

Bravely Face Adversity

Gregory describes how a pastor should expect to face adversity. He exhorts the one who wishes to be a pastor to understand that leadership is difficult and that adversity should be expected. Gregory reminds that pastor that Jesus, who was Creator, submitted Himself to suffering on behalf of His creation even though He had the ability to overwhelm any kind of hostility. He encourages the pastor to prepare his mind for the struggle of ministry and to keep himself pure in his purpose. Gregory asserts that a pastor will be lured into seeking prosperity because of the struggles that will beset his life, and that the pastor should diligently remain on guard against this temptation.

I have been in full time ministry for ten years now and can attest to the fact that adversity is a constant in ministry. Each day, new challenges arise as a sinful people reap consequences from their actions. As I have worked to create disciples, I often find them unwilling or aggressively defiant as I exhort them to follow the truths of Scripture. I also experience hardship emotionally and financially as the vagaries of life beset my family. Since I hold a position of leadership, it is tempting to influence others to “solve” my problems by blessing me financially. I must constantly remind myself that the resources of the Lord are not mine for the taking, and that I should seek only Him and allow Him to work to help me with my struggles.

Live an Inspiring Life but Cherish Solitude with God

Gregory sought to remind the pastor that he should live in such a manner that others value his character and wish to emulate his actions. This behavior is good, but there is a risk that the fame of being such a person might become more valuable to the pastor then spending time in the presence of God.

I have experienced this situation and have found that I must be diligent to keep my perspective proper. It can be a subtle temptation. The simple fact that I must work hard to impact others can become the focus of my life rather than resting in God’s presence and allowing Him to change hearts and solve problems. I can easily seize control and find myself empty due to the energy expended rather than standing amazed at the work that God performed as I lifted situations up to Him in prayer.

Concerning the Life of the Pastor

The next section of Gregory’s book focuses on eleven attributes that should mark a pastor’s life. Three of these attributes stood out as especially important to my life: being the first in service to others, being humble among those who do good yet firm with zeal against the vices of sinners, and having the ability to resist pleasing others while seeking to encourage them toward what ought to be pleasing to themselves.

First in Service to Others

Gregory reminds pastors that their flocks should follow their example rather than just their words. He submits that the people will more easily follow and apply the pastor’s words when his way of life affirms the truth of the words he has spoken to them. Gregory describes the priestly vestments of the Old Testament priests and how they symbolized the great virtues that must “adorn” a pastor in ways that can be observed by those he serves.

I have found that it is much easier to speak convincingly about God’s Word than it is to act upon that Word. Leadership of others demands action and not just words. I have found that people become inspired and highly motivated when they can put their faith into action. However, that initial endeavor to step out and do something is often the most difficult action in a series of events. When I have been able to motivate myself to take action and encourage others to join with me, I see incredible results. My observation is supported by James 1:22, which encourages us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Humble Among the Good and Firm Against the Vices of Sinners

The next attribute that spoke to me was Gregory’s observation that pastors should be seen as humble among those who do good. This reminder recognizes the temptation to become filled with pride in holding such a position of leadership and being a “doer of good.” The respect that comes to a pastor can easily swell his pride in self, and a pastor is wise to remember his fallen condition and the grace that has been given to him by the loving Lord. This humility will create strong relationships with those who are also striving to do good and will prevent the pastor from being ensnared in sin which results from pride.

Gregory follows this thought with a reminder that a pastor should be firm in standing against the vices of sinners. He certainly is not to be silent in humility as a fellow sinner, but should raise his voice to speak truth in love to those who are being destroyed by sin.

I have experienced this internal struggle in which I feel unworthy to criticize the actions of others as I reflect upon my own wrongdoings. I must strive to consciously remember the position I have been called to and to speak out in truth and love for the good of the one that is beset by the vices of sin.

Able to Resist Pleasing Others and Able to Encourage Others

Gregory describes how a pastor will experience the allure of speaking what people will be pleased to hear. By delivering only messages that please them, the pastor receives their affirmation and builds up his influence among the people. This tempting path will make it difficult for the pastor to address hard issues with his people because he will place greater value on receiving the peoples’ accolades than on communicating God’s Truth to them in order to address the sin that attacks them. Conversely, Gregory shares that a pastor should be able to boldly stand and encourage others toward what should ultimately please them. The pastor’s words should be able to explain the value of applying God’s Truth to the congregants’ lives in a way that draws people toward the truth rather than merely making them feel rebuked for not following God’s directions.

I have observed how people give negative feedback to preaching when they are unhappy about having certain issues addressed. Sermons on tithing are often vilified by congregants who seek to see such topics removed from the preaching schedule. As a pastor, I must seek to understand why the people are uncomfortable, and lovingly confront such unpopular issues while providing the underlying reason for God’s commands and why they are beneficial to all men’s lives.

Conclusion

St. Gregory the Great’s *The Book of Pastoral Rule* is as pertinent to pastors today as it was when he wrote it in AD 590. This book reflects the thoughts of a godly man who demonstrated with his life as well as his words the devotion with which he served God. His work shows a shrewd mind that understood the precepts of leadership that pastors would need to lead their congregations. He also understood the humanity of pastors and was able to speak to the pitfalls that those pastors would need to guard against. His work is also a tribute to God’s Word, as Gregory reminds pastors of God’s love for His people and the responsibility the pastors have to serve His children.

I have concluded that I should review this book annually and seek to be reminded by these words of the task that I have been assigned. I am certain there will be aspects that I will be sensitized to, and those will be areas for me to focus on as I work to serve God’s people in the coming year.