

What is a pastor?
TEXT: 1 Peter 5:1-5

PHBF 3.3.13
Scr. Reading: Acts 20:17-32
The Church, Its Members, and Their Pastors

[Ralph's song:]

Matthew 16:18 *"I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

This text is the first occurrence of the word "church" in the Bible. It's significant for several reasons. It shows us that the church is:

- Jesus own possession: "my church" (He owns it, He names it)
- The single organization He founded and to which He has committed Himself: "I will build my church"
- His unstoppable means for completing His mission & advancing His kingdom in the world: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"

What Jesus says next is even more significant, at least for our purposes this morning:

Matthew 16:19 *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Jesus gives Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," effectively delivering to him *the authority of God Himself*. Later, Jesus indicates that this authority—the "power of the keys"—resides in the church and is expressed in what we call "church discipline":

Matthew 18:15-18 ¹⁵ *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

In other words, anyone who falls under the discipline of the church is bound, declared to be outside the kingdom community and no longer a member of the church. And apparently, according to v 18, that decision by the church is ratified in heaven. Why? Because the church has Christ's authority. He has given the church and its leaders what He calls "the keys to the kingdom." It is the authority to require obedience from

Christians, the right to command them and hold them under a binding decision. This level of authority in the lives of believers is the exclusive domain of the Lord Jesus Christ. But what we learn from the Bible is that he has shared this authority with the church and its leaders: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (16:19, 18:18).

"What is a pastor?" is the title of today's sermon. It's the third and final one in our series on the local church, along with "What is a church?" and "What is a church member?" All 3 of these sermons hang together. A church, rightly understood, implies membership; and membership, rightly understood, demands pastors. Let me explain:

- A church, we saw from Acts 4, is a group of people who are united spiritually, committed personally, and focused missionally. And as soon as you start talking about *commitment*, you're dealing with more than Sunday church attendance.
- A church member, we saw from the warp and woof of the NT, is converted, committed, and involved. One of those biblical commitments is to certain elders who agree to care for them.

The point is, when you rightly understand the church, you'll see the need for membership. And when you understand membership, you'll get a sense of what pastors are and do.

We're going to take 1 Peter 5 as our text, since it is one of the fullest descriptions, if not *the fullest*, of a pastor in the Bible:

1 Peter 5:1-4 *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

PRELIMINARIES (vv 1-2) – PTA

Plurality (v 1). The overwhelming NT pattern is that each church have more than one of these men—notice the plural "elders" in v 1. The Jerusalem church had elders (Acts 11:30). Paul and Barnabas appointed

elders in the new churches they planted on their journeys (Acts 14:23). And that pattern is sustained in the NT letters (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 4:14,5:17 Titus 1:5, James 5:14). Churches are led by elders, plural, who serve the church together as equals.

Terminology (vv 1-2). I want to make sure we're all clear that "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" all refer to the same office. Peter uses all three terms here, two of them in verb form (NIV renders them as nouns): "I urge the elders... shepherd the flock, exercising oversight." At PH, we intend to use the terms "pastor" and "elder" interchangeably.

Accountability (v 2). Notice the phrase "the flock of God" (v 2). It's a reminder to the elders that the sheep do not belong to them. God entrusts His sheep to certain pastors for their lifetime, and He expects those men to return His sheep someday, well-fed and secure. In other words, elders serve as stewards. They exist for the church, not the other way around. God entrusts certain people to the care of specific elders, and those elders serve those certain people for Him.

"Certain people... to specific elders"? Yes. Notice again the phrase "among you" (v 2). We might paraphrase it: "Care for the sheep God has gathered around you." This is not a random gathering of sheep around just any elders. God puts certain people under the pastoral care of specific shepherds. Notice also the phrase in v 3: "those in your charge." It's a single word in Greek which literally means "lot" or "portion" — "those allotted to your charge" (NAS). Allotted by whom? By God. He draws certain sheep to certain shepherds, and He holds those shepherds accountable for the specific people He has given to them.

Paradigm shift: This idea of God giving certain sheep to specific shepherds might seem contrary to how you view your association with a church. From our perspective, our association with a certain church and its elders seems entirely voluntary, right? We initiate it ourselves, we maintain it if we so desire, and we end it as we please. But biblically speaking, that's not the whole picture. God allots certain sheep to specific shepherds ("those allotted to you" v 3). And then He draws those sheep to those men in His way at His time. To use another biblical metaphor, He arranges each body with precisely the parts He chooses:

1 Corinthians 12:18 *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body,*

each one of them, as he chose.

Bodies don't arrange themselves, and body parts aren't free to migrate to the body of their own choosing!

You might need to shift paradigms here as to how you became part of this particular local church. If you're a member of this body, realize that "God arranges the members in the body, each one of them — including you — as He chose" (1 Cor 12:18). And if you're under these elders, God gave you to their charge. His sovereignty is behind all of this, and when we understand that, it heightens our sense of belonging and obligation. God gave you to these elders and these elders to you. To do what?

DUTIES (v 2)

1. Shepherd — "shepherd the flock of God that is among you"

It's a metaphor God uses of His own relationship with His people, most notably in Psalm 23 (cf. also Ez 34). Jesus calls Himself "the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10). Hebrews calls Him the "great shepherd of the sheep" (Hb 13:20), and Peter says He is "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pt 2:25). The TRUE shepherd and overseer of your soul is God Himself. Human pastors are here to represent and act on behalf of Him.

It's also a humble metaphor. A shepherd isn't typically powerful, notable, particularly gifted. But he is responsible, sacrificial, and capable — at least at feeding and caring for sheep. Which is his primary job.

When the Bible calls a pastor a "shepherd," that title puts very clear limits on his duties and his self-understanding. A shepherd feeds sheep, protects them from danger, cares for them, and leads them. Period. But today's Christian culture has redefined the pastoral office to be almost anything except a shepherd. Taking our cues from the secular culture, we've tried to redefine successful pastoral ministry as growing a big business or delivering a good product or managing a successful team. Whatever happened to shepherding sheep for God?

Os Guinness, in *Dining with the Devil*, recounts the words of a Japanese businessman: “Whenever I meet a Buddhist leader, I meet a holy man. Whenever I meet a Christian leader, I meet a manager.”

No, no, a thousand times, no. A pastor is not a CEO or entrepreneur, applying business principles to grow the company. He is not a coach, cheering on the players and shaping a winning program. He is not a strip mall manager, developing a collection of trendy stores which target individual audiences and needs. A pastor is a shepherd who watches over certain of Jesus’ sheep which have been entrusted to him by God.

I cannot stress this enough. A pastor is a shepherd, not a life coach. He’s a spokesman for God, not a motivational speaker. He’s a farmer, not an entrepreneur. He’s a pray-er, not a strategizer. He’s a holy example, not a celebrity. He’s a fool for Jesus, not a respected white-collar professional. God tells His pastors exactly what they must be and do to care for His church—shepherd the flock, exercise oversight, preach the word, pray down God’s blessing.

This simple duty/title “shepherd” offers a comprehensive scope of the pastor’s duties. His task, quite simply, is the care of sheep, whatever their needs. He is accountable for the lives and well-being of sheep, whatever that demands. His calling is to do everything up to the point of laying down his life, for the good of Jesus’ sheep. “Shepherd the flock of God,” Peter says. A man who does *that* is a pastor.

2. Exercise Oversight

Elders not only care for the flock; they oversee it. They rule and manage it, with the authority of Jesus Himself, as we saw earlier from Matthew 16 and 18 and many other texts. And they do this—they use their authority—for the good of the sheep. Paul told the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:28 *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.*

The writer to the Hebrews said:

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Jesus loves His church. These are His sheep, for whom He laid down His life. He actively protects them from countless threats, including attacks from Satan, persecution from outsiders, false teaching from apostates, and even unrepentant sin from within our own lives. How does Jesus protect His flock from all these dangers? Through the work of faithful pastors who wield Jesus’ authority for the good of His people.

Peter describes elders’ oversight with 3 negatives and 3 positives: “not under compulsion, not for shameful gain, not domineering.” Instead “willingly, eagerly, being examples.” The point is, theirs is always a benevolent use of authority—authority expressed with care, compassion, and nurture.

Another paradigm shift?: For some of you, your experience at work, in church, in your family causes you to recoil from authority, mistrust it, or even fear it. You certainly don’t associate authority with kindness or self-sacrifice. We’ve all known an overbearing leader, and we’ve all heard the adage: “Power corrupts.” But not so in the church. Yes, elders possess authority, but they use it the way Jesus would. After all, elders are ministers of the gospel, and the gospel tells us our leader laid his life down for our good. Don’t let fear of harsh *authoritarian* leadership make you shy away from Christlike *authoritative* leadership.

DEVICES

These are a pastor’s primary duties: shepherd the flock and exercise oversight. What practical means does he use to get these things done? The Bible gives us three devices, three tools in the pastoral toolbox. All three involve aspects of shepherding and aspects of oversight. Most all of an elders’ time is spent doing one of these three things:

- Congregational leadership
- Teaching
- Pastoral care

Leadership is the administrative piece of shepherding and oversight. It involves casting vision, organizing the whole body, initiating ministry, leading our worship gathering and the ordinances, overseeing other

meetings, sometimes managing staff, etc. It's clearly a function of exercising oversight, but it's all done with the heart and goals of a shepherd. I call this the "ministry of the church."

Teaching is, of course, the "ministry of the word," and it's the most public of a pastor's duties. It is through sound teaching that pastors feed and protect the sheep. Time and again, churches have been led astray by persuasive false teachers who were, in some cases, teaching directly from the Bible! God's answer to this danger is discerning, protective, courageous pastors! This is precisely why elders must possess strong doctrinal understanding and the ability to teach.

Pastoral care is the "ministry of the saints." It's the individual attention pastors provide in counseling, advising, admonishing, encouraging, and discipling the members of the church. Remember, God has given specific sheep to specific shepherds, and He holds those men accountable for the wellbeing of the particular people under their care.

1 Peter 5:2 *shepherd the flock of God that is among you...*

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*

Acts 20:28 *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.*

The universe teems with enemies to your soul: the devil and his demons, unbiblical philosophies, worldly values, temptation, indwelling sin... Watchful elders are critical to your soul's survival.

This last area—the ministry of the saints, personal pastoral care—is one where your elders have been convicted to step up and do better. **[Ref. the "Pastor's Heart.]** We have come to realize that this responsibility goes far beyond what we can do during our weekly gatherings. We know full well that people can participate in all the normal functions of congregational life yet still not feel and find themselves cared for, known, and truly shepherded the way our Chief Shepherd, Jesus, would do.

Therefore, we have determined to attempt to visit each member of our church in his/her home at least once a year. We desire for the visit to be

far more than just a social meeting however. We hope to talk about your spiritual health, your sense of God's work in your life, your family relationships, your involvement with the church, and other matters of eternal concern. Of course, we want you to rest assured that we will not be rude or intrusive; rather, we want to make you happy!

2 Corinthians 1:24 *Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.*

We've divided the congregation into three groups, one for each of us. In the next few weeks, we'll contact you individually reminding you of our desire and requesting a time to meet. At the visit, we'll discuss matters of life and godliness. The visit won't be intimidating. Rather, we intend to encourage and teach through the comfort and application of the gospel. And finally, we'll report general results to the other elders so we can pray for your more effectively together. We have three goals:

- 1) to get to know our people,
- 2) to contribute to their spiritual wellbeing, and
- 3) to gather information to help the elders pray intelligently for them.

Please help us with this endeavor by welcoming us into your home—and into your life.

Leadership, teaching, and pastoral care. I said earlier that these are the three tools in the pastor's toolbox. That's not quite true. There is a fourth, but it's so fundamental to all the others that it's not quite right to call this merely an additional tool in the box. It's more like the extension cord that brings power to the tools. And that's prayer. Prayer is the lifeblood of pastoral ministry. It's his actually chief calling, because it's the only way he gets anything done at all.

See, all of this is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. Everything about the pastoral calling—its duties, its qualifications, its successes, its rewards, its goals, its attraction, its production—is utterly supernatural. This is the essence of pastoral ministry because this is the gospel—God Himself, coming down in grace, to bless the unworthy who are happiest to receive Him. And that's the way it has to be, or no one would do it. It's so hopeless and so counter-cultural and so counterintuitive, it makes no sense unless God Himself is your supply. But when He is, you have all you need.

I want to correct the impression I left in the last sermon about how my accountability for your souls makes me tremble. This sort of fear isn't the emphasis in the NT; rather, the NT pictures pastoral accountability as a matter of joy. It's right here in our text from 1 Peter:

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Or Paul, to the saints in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 1:14 *...on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.*

And in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 ¹⁹ *For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?* ²⁰ *For you are our glory and joy.*

Paul describes his churches as his “hope and joy and crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming... For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thes 2:19-20). This seems very much in line with how I envision crowns and rewards in heaven – give me a sanctified church, a group of people whom I've loved and counseled and prayed for and washed with the water of the word. Given the power of the gospel and the presence of the Spirit unleashed through faithful prayer, it's a guarantee. And it's more than reward enough for me.

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