

A photograph of a sunset over a beach. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by dark, silhouetted clouds. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun, with wispy clouds catching the light. In the foreground, tall, thin grasses are silhouetted against the bright sky and the ocean. The ocean surface is calm, reflecting the golden light of the sunset. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The Pastoral Heresy

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Published by Christ Assembly
1360 S. Patrick Dr., Suite 1A
Satellite Beach, FL 32937

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Introduction

Consider this question: “Who was the pastor at Corinth?” Likewise, who was the pastor at Ephesus, Philippi, Rome? The New Testament does not provide answers to those questions. Today, everyone knows the church pastor. Why have things changes so much? They have changed because a fundamental evil has entered the church and I call it The Pastoral Heresy.

As a teenager, I became interested in devoting my life to full-time service to the Lord Jesus Christ. At that point, I prayed about pursuing traditional pastoral ministry. I truly enjoyed various ministries in small churches serving as Youth Director, Consultant, Assistant Pastor, and Pastor. I have also enjoyed teaching the Bible in formal college level classes. I continue in pastoral ministry at a beach today with very small groups.

As I went through school, I divided my time between my studies and traditional ministry. I began to observe that some pastors suffered from a peculiar problem. Many of them, not all, thought they were in charge of their church. They believed they were the Chief Executive Officer, and the people in the church were there to serve them and support their programs. In fact, they even used titles such as “Senior Pastor,” “Pastor Smith,” “Bishop Jones,” or similar titles forbidden by Jesus. I realized that Pastors sought and demanded (sometimes not so subtly) that they be recognized as the greatest person in the congregation, and they wielded all the authority and leadership in the congregation. In some cases, people expected me to be king over the congregation.

Throughout church history, people have sought to consolidate power in the church for their own benefits. In some cases, groups have decided that one man will be the “Vicar of Christ” and use that blasphemous title to describe himself as the head of the Roman Catholic Church. They claim a direct line of apostolic succession from the supposed first pope, Peter. Of course, the Bible supports no such claims and in fact those claims exemplify what I have labeled The Pastoral Heresy. Protestants are not immune from such blasphemous actions. As I have tried to explain in the following pages, Jesus is the only Head of His Church, and the only Rabbi, Teacher and Leader. He shares those titles with no one.

The Pastoral Heresy

I truly love the work of shepherds who use their spiritual gifts to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. The Church Overseers should help the church fulfill His mission for the church and the local assemblies. Confusing The Spiritual Gift of Shepherd with elders and the Church Office of Overseer has led to great problems. In some denominations, they teach that the pastor is always an elder. The New Testament does not support such a conclusion. A plurality of elders (with the congregation's support), the Church Overseers and Church Deacons, and male saints with The Spiritual Gift of Leaders and The Spiritual Gift of Navigators all play a significant role in the leadership of the church. The Church Deacons in the Bible did not wait on tables, but were spiritual men with supervision over important ministries. We have no record that Church Deacons ever served one table. Instead, we see them preaching the Gospel, evangelizing the masses, and directing the ministries of the church appointed to them by the apostles (both an office and a spiritual gift).

I hope you understand that Pastors in many churches pose an enormous problem to the church. On the one hand, the congregation wants a spiritual king to lead them, namely their Pastor. In their mind, that is why they pay him. On the other hand, the Pastor often believes that the congregation expects him to provide leadership and he must make all the important decisions. If he leaves the ministry to the people, well, many of the members of the church have never been born again in Christ.

By exposing and discussing The Pastoral Heresy, I know that many staunch defenders of The Pastoral Heresy will oppose the message here, and I am certainly not standing on my own personal righteousness or behavior. I have my own problems and triumphs in Christ Jesus. Instead, I am urging believers to consider very carefully the Scriptures daily, and see if the things described in this work are true based upon the teachings of God in the Bible. You must make your choices and then apply the Bible to eliminate The Pastoral Heresy. God grants grace and repentance to all who seek Him in truth. His word is truth and will sanctify every believer.

December 26, 2016

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1

The Greatest Problem

The Pastoral Heresy lurks today, just like the disciples battled that problem while walking with Jesus. Before we go too far, let me define the terms. The term “pastoral” means here that a particular person, labeled a pastor in most Protestant churches today, operates as the person in foremost charge of a particular church or group of churches. The term “heresy” means here that a particular doctrine, practice, or teaching has departed from the truths found in the Word of God, the Bible. So, just to be clear, I intend to illuminate the heresy within the church today of pastors acting like they are in foremost charge of the church, when in fact such action departs from the clear teaching of the Word of God and causes severe problems in the Body of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ. Please do not misunderstand. God bestowed the spiritual gift of “pastor” upon individual believers to “equip saints for the work of ministry” and to perform wonderful spiritual service to God.¹ The special meaning I am giving the term “pastoral” here should never be interpreted to mean that all pastors fall into The Pastoral Heresy. In order to avoid personal opinions here, we will focus upon the truth of the Word of God. We will start with a look at a critical problem surfacing in the lives of the twelve disciples of Jesus. The Pastoral Heresy caused the disciples of

¹ Ephesians 4:12 provides that shepherds and teachers should use their gifts for the equipping of the saints for the work of service. The saints will do the work of service, that results in the building up of the Body of Christ. The Granville Sharp rule for equating “shepherd” and “teacher” does not apply to plural nouns, as the case here. The Pastoral Heresy undermines this process of equipping the saints for the work of service by focusing upon the shepherd, and not the saints who will do the ministry.

Jesus to seek their own personal glory and distracted them from the ministry Jesus entrusted to them. They became more concerned about themselves than about Jesus.

“And there arose a dispute among them as to which one of them was thought to be the greatest.”

Luke 22:24

The Greatest Dispute

In the Gospel of Luke, the twelve disciples more than once argued among themselves as to who was to be regarded as the greatest among them. We see in those passages how sinful human nature always produces a desire to be first, the head, the leader, the greatest. So, we will look at Luke 22, and observe the roots of The Pastoral Heresy. Please recall that human nature has not changed, and some disciples still want to be regarded as the greatest among all the disciples. The background to that discussion helps us understand the desire for greatness. What prompted the disciples to argue about greatness?

The Argument

Their argument related directly to the revelation by Jesus that the “hand of the one betraying Me was on the table with Mine.”² Following that revelation, a discussion immediately arose among the disciples regarding the

²The Greek phrase here for “the one betraying Me” (“τοῦ παραδιδόντος με”) included the present active participle, indicating in this context that the betrayal was already underway. We know that Satan had already entered into Judas and he had already made a deal with the chief priests and officers to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-4).

identity of the one who was going to betray Him. Luke, writing a consecutive account of the life of Jesus,³ did not elaborate upon that discussion. Instead, the Holy Spirit moved Luke to focus upon the next discussion among the disciples about personal greatness and reputation. So often in our Christian lives we take the revelation Jesus provided, and then immediately ignore that revelation and turn to thinking about our own personal interests and reputations. Many believers find it very difficult to stay focused upon the words of Jesus by giving Him their full attention. Today, that means that when you read the Word of God, listen to Jesus speaking through His Word just as if He were standing there right before you. Furthermore, human nature will always be more concerned about you than about Jesus. Do not let your attention falter and fade away from Jesus. In this instance, the disciples quickly became more concerned about their personal reputations, perhaps because they had some idea that Jesus was predicting His own death, and they would be without Him.⁴

The Greatest Among Them

Just after Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him, they changed the subject from who was the worst among them to who would be regarded as the greatest among them. Please observe how sin works to produce discussions and claims of greatness among disciples. It is the greatest-among-them problem to seek or claim superiority over others based upon your own thinking, acts, or reputation. The disciples disputed greatness among themselves. Notice three points about the dispute. First, the dispute arose among disciples. They were not comparing themselves to people outside the circle of men Jesus hand-picked to be with Him day in and day out.⁵ No, this problem was among believers and about greatness as disciples

³Luke 1:3.

⁴ We know that at the arrest of Jesus, they were still prepared to fight for Him so that the authorities would not take Him. See Luke 22:47-53.

⁵No doubt the disciples also wanted everyone everywhere to know who was the greatest among the disciples, but this discussion was among themselves, and filled with personal jealousy.

of Jesus. They were all personally chosen to be with Jesus. Second, notice the argument centered upon one man and each man. The disciples were not acting or thinking about Jesus or the team of disciples. They were now focused upon individual glory. Third, notice the word “thought.”⁶ The construction focused upon the mind and attitude of the disciples. From their early days as disciples, they were already consumed with discussions and arguments about personal rank and greatness among themselves.⁷

“And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called Benefactors.’”

Luke 22:25

⁶The Greek term for the word “thought” (“δοκεῖ”) means in this context what other people think about you, how other people perceive you in terms of rank. This basic term δοκεῖ occurs with the infinitive here (“εἶναι”) and other places. It has the force of a verb, and in Galatians 6:3, for example, the Holy Spirit told us that if anyone thinks (“δοκεῖ”) he is something (“τις εἶναι”), then he is nothing.

⁷Compare Luke 9:46-56. In this passage, Jesus taught His disciples about “greatness” by placing a child before them. The “greatest” person in the kingdom of heaven will be like a child, converted and humble. Two stories then follow this teaching. First, the disciples saw someone casting out demons in the name of Jesus, and the disciples tried to prevent him. Instead, Jesus declared that he who is not against you is for you. Notice that because the disciples are not lords over other people, they should not oppose other people casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Second, Jesus sent His messengers before Him to prepare for His visits. When a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus, the disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven upon that village. Because they should never lord their authority over anyone, Jesus rebuked His disciples for such attempts to exercise extreme authority and moved on to another village. These two stories provide nice illustrations of what it means to lord authority over other people.

Lording It

Jesus then examined the worldly practice of Gentile kings lording it over the people.⁸ The Romans had occupied the land of Israel for decades before Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. They compelled the Jews to pay taxes, and submit to Roman authority. In contrast, Jesus taught His disciples never to lord themselves over other disciples. Jesus also highlighted the problem of Gentile titles and the way they lorded authority over other people, whom the lords considered as their subjects.⁹ Jesus taught His disciples that He never intended one disciple to exercise authority over another disciple. Jesus explained that the Gentiles recognized certain people

⁸The Greek term for “lord it over” (“κυριεύουσιν”) means to exercise power or authority over a person. This same root word occurs in 2 Corinthians 1:23 where Paul said he did not come again to the Corinthians so that he may spare them. Paul knew of the turmoil and problems in the church at Corinth, but he spared them his coming. Then Paul continued: “Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.” This passage provides some key insights into what “lording over” means. In contrast to exercising strict authority, Paul said he and others (“we”) were workers with you (“συνεργοί”) for your joy. Instead of describing himself as a lord, he called himself a fellow worker. He was on the same level with the Corinthians when it came to work. He worked with his ministry team and with the Corinthians shoulder to shoulder, and not as a lord ruling over them. He worked to promote their joy.

⁹The Greek term “exercised authority” (“ἐξουσιάζοντες”) means someone or something has mastery over you. Consider the use of the related word for “authority” in 1 Corinthians 6:12 where Paul related his freedom to eat many things, and do many things, but he “will not be mastered (“ἐξουσιασθήσομαι”) by anything.” Paul would not allow anything to control him or dictate his behavior.

as rulers¹⁰ who lord it over them. Furthermore, Jesus also observed that the great men among the Gentiles exercised authority over them. Jesus never intended any of His disciples to be recognized as rulers of Christians or called great men. Jesus never intended for any of His disciples to be a ruler who lorded it over other believers. Jesus never intended for any of His disciples to exercise authority as a great man. He taught His disciples to be servant leaders, like a child. Jesus did not want His disciples to use such titles at any time. Jesus cited the title “Benefactor” used by the Gentile kings.¹¹ Titles like “Benefactor” may sound very nice, but Jesus opposed His disciples using such titles, as we will see in detail below. Instead, Jesus commanded His disciples to avoid The Pastoral Heresy, which in this passage meant His disciples must avoid “lording over” and using titles for themselves.

“But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.”

Luke 22:26

Servants

Jesus has always had this marvelous way of teaching His disciples what they needed to know right then. As the disciples quarreled about greatness,

¹⁰The Greek term here for “rulers” (“ἄρχειν” –present active infinitive) is used as a noun to describe being a chief, leader, or a person exercising power over subjects. The only other use that exact term occurs in Romans 15:12 to describe Jesus as the Root of Jesse Who will rule over the Gentiles and be the hope of the Gentiles.

¹¹The Greek term for “Benefactor” (“εὐεργέται”) means to be a doer of good works, as a title of honor implying that this king bestows benefits from above as lord to the subjects beneath him. Compare the “συνεργοί” of 2 Corinthians 1:24.

Jesus taught them about the error of Gentile kings lording their power over their subjects. Christians are not called to be kings who lord it over the other Christians. On the contrary, the greatest¹² among them must not think of themselves as lords or bestow upon themselves titles of greatness. Instead, they must learn from Jesus how to be like a child, converted and humble before God our only Master. Jesus explained that the “greatest” among you must become like the “youngest.”¹³ Jesus turned things upside down in the thinking of the disciples on many occasions. Even as He prepared Himself for crucifixion and death, He continued to love the disciples and teach them by example how to live and serve other people, especially the disciples. Jesus constantly taught the power of love from God exemplified in how we treat our friends in Christ. Jesus also indicated that the “leader”¹⁴ must become

¹²The Greek term for “greatest” (“μείζων”) was a concept Jesus defined carefully in Matthew 18:1-6. In that passage, Jesus called a child to Him and said whoever is converted and humbles himself like this child shall be greatest (“μείζων”) in the kingdom of heaven.

¹³The Greek term for “youngest” (“νεώτερος”) is a term of comparison, so it may be translated “younger” or “youngest.” In Luke 15:12 Jesus used the same word to describe the younger of the two brothers in the story of the prodigal son. Jesus also used the term in John 21:18 to inform Peter that when he was younger, Peter would gird himself and go where he wished; but when he would “grow old, you will stretch out your hand and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

¹⁴The Greek term here for “leader” (“ἡγούμενος”—present middle/passive participle) means in this context a person with authority to command, to lead, to speak. In Matthew 2:6 Matthew quoted the Old Testament: Bethlehem was by no means the least among the leaders of Judah. Likewise, Luke used the same term in Acts 14:12 to describe Paul as the “chief speaker” (“ἡγούμενος”) because he spoke more than Barnabas. Notice that in these other instances, the sense of plurality appears that the leader is one among other leaders. In Philippians 2:3 Paul reminded us that we must regard (“ἡγούμενοι”) everyone as more important. This same attitude must characterize Christian leadership. In Hebrews 13:17, every believer must

like a servant.¹⁵ Jesus also presented Himself as the perfect example of the humble servant. Jesus never worried about His personal position, because He came to earth to give His life a ransom for many and to die a cruel death. He accomplished all the work His Father had given Him to do, including setting the Servant-Leader example.

“For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who deacons.”

Luke 22:27

obey your “leaders” (“ἡγουμένοις”—present middle/passive deponent participle dative masculine plural—notice that leaders are males here) and the leaders keep watch over your souls and render an account of their ministry. They must serve with joy and without grief.

¹⁵The Greek term for “deacons” (“διακονῶν”—present active participle) conveys the idea of service. Paul himself illustrated this term in Romans 15:25 where Paul takes a contribution from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem to help the poor there. Likewise, Jesus used the term “deacon” (“διάκονος”) in Matthew 20:26. In that passage, Jesus also added that whoever wishes to be “first among you” (“πρῶτος”) shall be your “slave” (“δοῦλος”). Jesus forcefully emphasized this theme repeatedly: Matthew 23:11; Mark 10:43; John 12:26. Paul used the term “deacon” (“διάκονος”) to describe the government as a minister of God for good and it also serves as an avenger bringing wrath upon evil doers. Paul also used the term “deacon” (“διάκονος”) to describe himself (Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23; Colossians 1:25); Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7); Epaphras (Colossians 1:7); and Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6).

Jesus the Server

In Luke 22:27 Jesus first asked His disciples about greatness. The questions Jesus asked constantly challenged His disciples and others to reconsider their own beliefs, emotions, and desires. Jesus probed everyone's actions, intentions and motives on the deepest spiritual levels with His questions. In this case, Jesus gently prodded His disciples to consider greatness. Jesus served His disciples, while they reclined in comfort, eating their meal. Jesus pointed out that custom and habit among His disciples indicated that the greatest reclined while others served them the meal. Then Jesus illustrated to them that, although they were reclining, He was taking the humble position of serving them while they reclined. Jesus loved to use strong visual statements like this service to teach His disciples. Picture in your mind the twelve reclining around a table, with Jesus moving about as a servant providing them the meal. They were discussing greatness among themselves, apparently oblivious to their God and Creator quietly moving among them and serving them. Jesus made His point about the greatest being the servant by demonstrating to them exactly what servant leadership meant. Furthermore, Jesus also had to tell them the significance of what He was doing by acting like a servant. So often we miss the points Jesus makes to us because we fail to see Him serving us in the same ways He served people throughout the Gospels. He did not appear as the King in His glory, but rather He came to seek and to save the lost, and to give His life a ransom for many. In summary, then, we see that the "greatest" problem means that a disciple seeks to be the greatest among the disciples, and craves a reputation, particularly among disciples, of being the greatest disciple. They do these evil things while Jesus washes their feet, and they have forgotten completely that Jesus continues to set the perfect example of service. As servants first, all the disciples of Jesus must avoid lording themselves over others and never use titles. Jesus had much more to say about greatness, discipleship, and being a servant.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the "greatest" problem, we know that the roots of The Pastoral Heresy find sustenance in our evil human

nature, which produces arguments, divisions, and problems in the Body of Christ. Today, The Pastoral Heresy abounds in the vast majority of churches. The titles that believers use to exalt themselves underline their claims to be foremost in that assembly of believers. Jesus had sharp words for such titles and the people who used them.

How To Spot the Pastoral Heresy

1. Do you call someone at your church “Pastor Someone” or “Dr. Someone”?
2. Does someone at your church accept the title of “Senior Pastor”?
3. Do you call someone at your church “Reverend”?
4. Do you have a “Head Elder” at your church?
5. Do you call someone “Pope” at your church?
6. Do you call someone “Teacher” at your church?
7. Do you call someone “Deacon Someone” at your church?
8. Do you call someone “Father Someone” at your church?
9. Do you call someone “Bishop Someone” at your church?
10. Do you call someone “Apostle Someone” or “Prophet Someone” at your church?

All of those titles such as “Pastor,” “Senior Pastor,” “Reverend,” “Head Elder,” etc. were forbidden by Jesus. Let us take a look at why Jesus prohibited the use of titles within the Church and the evil results promoted by using such titles in the Church. And we all know that the term “church” in the New Testament means a group of people saved by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a ransom for all. Of course, if the people in your “church” do not have personal faith that they have received salvation as a free gift, then you may not be attending a “church” in any biblical sense of the term.

2

The Titles Problem

In Matthew 23:1-12 Jesus taught the crowds around Him and the disciples with Him about The Pastoral Heresy. He denounced the practice of seeking honor among people and using titles that divided the Body of Christ and exalted the servant rather than the Master, Jesus Christ.

“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples.”

Matthew 23:1

The Audience

In Matthew 23:1 please notice that Jesus had two audiences in mind. First, He mentioned the crowds. Every person needs to be aware of The Pastoral Heresy. When believers depart from the teaching of Jesus Christ, then that departure harms our testimony to the world of unbelievers. So, please recall that Jesus wanted even the crowds of unbelievers to know about The Pastoral Heresy. Second, also notice that Jesus specifically addressed His disciples. Everyone in the crowds knew about the various titles religious leaders in their day bestowed upon themselves. In contrast, Jesus wanted all the crowds to know that His disciples would never use those titles. His disciples left all those titles to Jesus Himself and Jesus alone. Jesus wanted everyone to be aware of all forms of The Pastoral Heresy. Jesus provided very clear directions to His men to avoid titles and honors that exalt and glorify the servant rather than the Master, Jesus Christ.

“saying, ‘The scribes and the pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;’”

Matthew 23:2

The Pharisees

In Matthew 23:2 Jesus described the scribes and the Pharisees as people who occupy the chair of Moses. Jesus meant that they had become the lawgivers. In their mind, they wanted everyone to follow their interpretations of the Law of Moses. One big problem was that the scribes and Pharisees did not know the God who gave the Law to Moses, and why God gave the Law. The scribes and Pharisees thought that keeping the Law of Moses would send people to heaven. In fact, it was impossible for anyone to keep the Law of Moses. Just one misstep and you sinned against God. The Law of Moses showed everyone just how sinful they were. In fact, sin took opportunity through the commandment to produce more sin.¹⁶ Jesus taught His disciples to be very careful of the teaching and actions of the scribes and the Pharisees.

¹⁶See Romans 7:7-12. In that passage, Paul used the example of coveting to show that the Law of Moses exposed sin, and once exposed, sin became even better known in the heart of the believer. Paul said after the commandment not to covet, sin produced “coveting of every kind.”

“therefore, all that they tell you to do, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”

Matthew 23:3

Hypocrisy

In Matthew 23:3 Jesus highlighted the difference between talking and doing. He said that the scribes and the Pharisees talked and commanded people to follow the Law of Moses, but they did not actually do what they told others to do. So, they were hypocrites because they said one thing, and did another. Jesus will explain more fully what He means in the next verses. Jesus will link this type of hypocrisy with using titles in the church.

“therefore, all that they tell you to do, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”

Matthew 23:3

Do and Observe

In Matthew 23:3 Jesus commanded His disciples to do all that the Pharisees commanded them to do and observe.¹⁷ Jesus exposed the root problem of the Pharisees here. They said one thing, but did not do the things they commanded others to do and observe.

“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Matthew 23:4

Heavy Burdens

In Matthew 23:4 the scribes and Pharisees exhibited their hypocrisy by interpreting the Law of Moses, and adding to the Law, to place tremendous burdens upon men.¹⁸ Jesus denounced both the acts and the attitudes of the

¹⁷In the Greek text, Jesus focused upon the words “do and observe” (“ποιήσατε καὶ τηρεῖτε”). Jesus commanded His disciples to understand what the Pharisees were saying, and do what they say. Notice that Jesus strongly warned the disciples not to do (“ποιεῖτε”) the deeds (“τὰ ἔργα”) of the Pharisees.

¹⁸The Greek term for “burdens” (“φορτία”) describes the heavy cargo that the scribes and Pharisees load upon men. In contrast to the “heavy” (“βαρέα”) burden of the false teachers, Jesus proclaimed that His burden (“τὸ φορτίον”) is light (“ἐλαφρόν”). Jesus offered the burdened and heavy

scribes and Pharisees. They weighed down the people, and never stooped themselves to move a single feather of weight with a finger. We see here that the Pastoral Heresy will always involve burdening others with heavy loads, while the “Pastor” never carries the same load himself. So often, poor people give tremendously to a ministry, but the “leader” of the ministry lives a lavish lifestyle. Jesus Himself never enjoyed the full monetary prosperity available to Him during His incarnation, but lived a homeless, traveling lifestyle, depending upon His Father to provide every need for Himself and everyone who followed Him. When men place heavy burdens upon others, and never touch those burdens with so much as a finger, they fall into the Pastoral Heresy.

“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.”

Matthew 23:5

Noticed by Men

In Matthew 23:5 the scribes and Pharisees did all their deeds to be noticed by men. In particular, they broadened their phylacteries (small boxes containing Scriptures worn by the Jews, particularly during prayer—see the command in Deuteronomy 6:8). So, Jesus drew attention to the scribes and Pharisees who enlarged the phylacteries they wore to bring more attention to their outward signs of piety, while increasing their own hypocrisy. Likewise, the scribes and Pharisees lengthened the tassels of their garments.

laden rest for their souls, and promised His yoke would be easy and His burden light (Matthew 11:28-30). We see then in Matthew 11:28-30 that Jesus was also promising a better spiritual life than heavy, hypocritical burdens which the scribes and Pharisees dropped upon the people.

The Pastoral Heresy

In Numbers 15:38 Moses commanded the people of Israel to make for themselves tassels on their garments with blue cords on each corner (see also Deuteronomy 22:12). While Moses commanded all the Jews to have cords, the scribes and Pharisees lengthened their cords to draw attention to themselves, but again only added to their own hypocrisy. Jesus condemned them for using their broadened phylacteries and lengthened cords to draw attention to themselves so that men would notice them. The Pastoral Heresy includes dressing so that people will notice you and recognize you as a “cleric” or spiritual person. Jesus never commanded His disciples to wear clerical collars, display clerical license plates, or wear anything that would draw attention to themselves as disciples.¹⁹ When people wear collars or other things to indicate their piety, they fall into The Pastoral Heresy.

“They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,”

Matthew 23:6

Loving Honor and Chief Seats

In Matthew 23:6 Jesus further exposed the desires of the scribes and Pharisees. They loved the place of honor at banquets. In Luke 14:7-11 Jesus also provided further insight into the issue of honor at banquets. There we read about a leader of the Pharisees inviting Jesus to his home for a meal. While there, Jesus noticed that people were picking out places of honor to seat themselves. Jesus then told everyone to seek the lowest

¹⁹Of course, the Bible does mention that in the spiritual arena, we have new clothing and we must wear it constantly to the glory of God. See, for example, Colossians 3:9-11.

positions at wedding feasts, so that if someone more distinguished entered, he would not have to give up his seat²⁰ With this desire to be honored by men and sit in chief seats, the Pharisees displayed for all to see their own greatness, particularly in relation to the other people. When people love the places of honor and the chief seats, they fall into The Pastoral Heresy.

“and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men,”

Matthew 23:7

Respectful Greetings and Rabbi

In Matthew 23:7 Jesus taught His disciples to avoid titles. Today, I see many Messianic groups ignore the clear teaching of Jesus. They love to call people “Rabbi Someone” as if they had never listened to the clear teaching of Jesus on this subject. In this verse, Jesus prohibited His disciples from calling anyone “Rabbi.” Jesus also stopped His disciples from using respectful greetings in the marketplace. Of course, some people may argue that Jesus only meant that the titles should not be coveted, but actually using them in humility would be fine. This argument ignores the verse itself and the fact that the twelve apostles did not use titles for themselves, when they could have called themselves Apostle Someone. Instead, they referred to themselves as “Paul, an apostle.”²¹ So, people seek respectful greetings and being called Rabbi and so fall into The Pastoral Heresy.

²⁰Luke 14:7-11.

²¹See Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1.

“But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.”

Matthew 23:8

Do Not Be Called Rabbi

In Matthew 23:8 Jesus unequivocally commanded His disciples to avoid the title of Rabbi. He never wanted anyone to be confused by His disciples applying the common term “Rabbi” to themselves. Jesus used the title for Himself alone.²² Notice that Jesus emphasized that only One was their Teacher, and that One was God. By implication, He also included Himself in that title. His disciples did not recognize other men as deserving the special title Rabbi. Titles in this verse also speak to the expectations of men, as in the previous verses. No disciple of Jesus should ever expect to hold the title of Rabbi, because Jesus alone is the Teacher.²³ Surely, some

²²Jesus accepted the title Rabbi for Himself. See e.g., John 1:38; Mark 11:21. Interestingly, the disciples of John the Baptist called John “Rabbi” (John 3:26). Apparently, some of the disciples of John the Baptist became disciples of Jesus (John 1:35-42, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter). Notice also that the disciples of Jesus immediately referred to Jesus as Rabbi, as Nathanael called Jesus “Rabbi” at their first meeting (John 1:49). Therefore, we see that the custom was to recognize teachers by the title “Rabbi,” but Jesus completely changed that custom for His disciples. No longer could they call anyone Rabbi, except Jesus Himself.

²³ Any attempt to allow the use of titles today, such as “Rabbi,” must surely fail because Jesus explicitly prohibited the use of titles. Some people may argue that Jesus only forbade the love of titles, just as He likened the love of money to sin. The argument would go “money in itself is not evil, and so titles by themselves are not evil; it only matters with what attitude you use

people have the spiritual gift of teaching, but, ideally, they only teach what Jesus has provided through the Bible, the Word of God. In the last phrase of the verse, Jesus based His teaching upon the family concept of brothers. When you were growing up, did you call your brother “Pastor” or “Rabbi” or “Leader” or “Teacher”? No. Why? Because you were growing up together in the same family. Likewise, in the family of Jesus Christ, we must be careful to avoid using titles for our brothers in Christ because we are all growing up together in Christ. By using the title Rabbi, people seek honor for themselves and so fall into The Pastoral Heresy.

“Do not call anyone on earth father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”

Matthew 23:9

Do Not Be Called Father

In Matthew 23:9 Jesus prohibited His disciples from using the term “father” to describe anyone on earth. While Jesus reserved the title “Rabbi” for Himself, He simultaneously reserved the title “father” for His heavenly Father alone. Only God the Father should be called “Father.” Notice that Jesus emphasized that our Father is in heaven. In fact, every family in heaven and on earth derives its name from God the Father. God determined in eternity past that the perfect model for explaining how we relate to one another and to God would be to consider ourselves one holy family. As

them.” This argument cannot stand because of the explicit command not to use titles. Jesus, verse by verse, excluded the use of specific titles, and then implied that all titles are forbidden. As you read through the following verses, please notice that Jesus went title by title. He gave different reasons for not using those titles. He taught that the titles mean something to people, and He commanded His disciples to avoid all titles.

believers, we are adopted into the family of God at the moment of rebirth. Jesus reminded His disciples that the Father of all believers resides in heaven, and we will be with Him one day. Therefore, when we hear entire groups use the term “Father Someone,” we know that those groups and everyone who calls any priest, cleric, or church leader by the term “Father” completely ignores the teaching of Jesus and so falls into The Pastoral Heresy.

“Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.”

Matthew 23:10

Do Not Be Called Leader

In Matthew 23:10 Jesus commanded His disciples not to call themselves “leader.”²⁴ In light of the titles that Jesus specifically prohibited, we should learn that Jesus was forbidding all titles. Many assemblies, in fact, the vast majority of assemblies, have widespread use of the term “Pastor Someone.” The use of the term “Pastor Someone” spreads The Pastoral

²⁴The Greek term for “leader” (“καθηγηταί and καθηγητής”) only appears in this verse in the New Testament. Jesus likely meant that any term for “leader” would be forbidden. In Luke 14:1 the Pharisees had leaders (“τῶν ἀρχόντων”). The church also had leaders: Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders” (“τοῖς ἡγουμένοις”); Hebrews 13:24, “Greet all your leaders” (“ἡγουμένους”); Acts 15:22, “Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” Even Joseph was described as a “esteemed one of Egypt” (“ἡγούμενον ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον”) in Acts 7:10. From these passages we see that people can be recognized as leaders, without anyone calling an individual “Leader Someone.”

Heresy as just another title. As we will see below, if you are referring to just one person in the congregation by his spiritual gift, then you are not being consistent in referring to everyone by their spiritual gift. If you are just using a title of respect, then you are falling into The Pastoral Heresy. So, when anyone accepts or uses the title “Leader Someone,” you will know that people have fallen into The Pastoral Heresy.

“But the greatest among you shall be your servant.”

Matthew 23:11

The Greatest, Your Servant

In Matthew 23:11 Jesus returned to His familiar theme: the greatest among His disciples shall be your servant. Please recall that Jesus perfectly modeled being the servant to His disciples and the entire world. He accepted the title of “Teacher,”²⁵ Likewise, Jesus accepted the title “Rabbi.”²⁶ Jesus emphasized to His disciples that the greatest among them would not use any title displaying their greatness, but that the greatest among them would serve the other disciples. Service exalted a person, not titles. Just as the hypocrisy of the Pharisees drove them to seek chief seats at banquets, respectful greetings in the market place, and titles, so in contrast, the lack of hypocrisy among the disciples of Jesus displayed their service to one another by actually performing the works commanded by God. The Pharisees loaded

²⁵For example, see Matthew 19:16: “Teacher, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:3).

burdens upon people, but never touched them. The disciples of Jesus helped people yoke up with Christ and find His burden light. When you see people using titles forbidden by Jesus and hear the title “Pastor Someone” or “Father Someone” or “Rabbi Someone,” you will know that people have no interest in being the servant Jesus commanded, because they love to be called the greatest, and so have fallen into The Pastoral Heresy.

“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Matthew 23:12

Humble and Exalted

In Matthew 23:12 Jesus warned that everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled. So, if you love the chief seats at banquets, respectful greetings in the market place, and titles, then you will be humbled. Jesus said to count upon it.²⁷ Jesus probed and revealed the motives of men. In this verse, Jesus

²⁷In Matthew 23:12 notice that Jesus used the passive voice for “you will be humbled” (“ταπεινωθήσεται”). The subject of the verb was not expressed, to emphasize the fact of the action, not who performed the action of humbling you. It may be a person who takes your seat at the banquet that humbles you. It may be a person who has more power, money, or glory than you. But one thing remains certain, sooner or later you will be humbled. Jesus always sought for His disciples to be humble, and to count upon exaltation to follow. Of course, Jesus himself provided the perfect example of service and suffering on earth, with glory to follow (“Was it not necessary

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explained that if you are motivated to be exalted, then humble yourself among men. Non-believers seek only their own glory and will be humbled. In contrast, obedient disciples of Jesus will always humble themselves and so be exalted. If you see someone using or accepting titles, then you know they have chosen to exalt themselves, and so lacking humility, they have fallen into The Pastoral Heresy. Not only does The Pastoral Heresy arise from the Greatest Problem and foster the use of “titles” forbidden by the Lord Jesus Christ, it also affects the unity of the Body of Christ. As people within a local assembly promote themselves as the greatest, or use or accept titles that display their love of respectful greetings, the essential unity of the Body of Christ suffers.

for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26).

3

The Unity Problem

Unity within the Body of Christ, in part, centers around every member of the Body of Christ using their spiritual gifts properly. As we will see in our study of Scripture below, if the proper use of the spiritual gifts distributed by God among the local believers does not happen, then the local congregation suffers a lack of spiritual maturity and doctrinal divisions arise, resulting in deceit and turmoil.

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers.”

Ephesians 4:11

God Gave Spiritual Gifts

In Ephesians 4:11 the Holy Spirit writing through Paul described some of the spiritual gifts distributed to the church. As we move through these verses, please keep in mind that this passage concerns “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Spiritual unity within the Body of Christ must be maintained, and the saints are commanded to preserve that unity.²⁸ Please note that God gives the gifts

²⁸The Greek term for “being diligent” (“σπουδάζοντες”—present active participle) means an eager and urgent haste to act, ultimately relating back

and we shall see that God had a specific reason for providing the gifts. Notice specifically that God gave the gifts of Shepherd and Teacher²⁹ for the specific purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, as we will explore in the next verse.

“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”

Ephesians 4:12

Equipping of the Saints

In Ephesians 4:12 we read about the purpose behind God giving gifts to the saints. Let us explore together the main points in this verse.

to the command to walk worthy of our calling by Christ Jesus and looking forward to the duty to preserve the unity of the Body of Christ in the bond of peace. This phrase “bond of peace” (“τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς ειρήνης”) stands in contrast to the “bond of iniquity” (“σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας”) incarcerating Simon the Magician in Acts 8:23, but closely connected in Colossians 3:14, to love, the “bond of unity” (“σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος”).

²⁹As above, please note the Granville Sharp rule requires that the substantives be singular. So, if someone asserts that the Granville Sharp rule of syntax proves that Shepherds and Teachers are two gifts found always in the same person, then they did not realize that the Granville Sharp rule requires singular substantives, and here Shepherds and Teachers are plurals. Therefore, the Granville Sharp rule does not apply. Shepherds and Teachers are separate and distinct gifts here.

Equipping.

We first see the word “equipping.”³⁰ Pastors do not do all the work of ministry, but rather equip the saints to do the work of ministry. Believers have a serious problem with understanding that the saints do the work of ministry, not just pastors. In fact, one root of The Pastoral Heresy lies in the ignorance of believers. Believers do not understand and fully grasp the teaching that they are gifted to perform the work of ministry. God gave the specific gifts of Shepherds and Teachers for the equipping of the saints. Notice the target ministry of pastors will be the saints themselves. Pastors equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. In 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 we learn that every believer at the moment of salvation: (1) has become a new creature in Christ; and (2) has been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation; and (3) has been commissioned as an ambassador for Christ. So, because of these lofty benefits bestowed upon each believer at salvation, pastors and teachers equip the saints to use their gift(s) to fulfill their unique and individual ministries.

Work of Service

The saints, not only the pastor, do the spiritual work of service. In fact, pastors are not gifted to perform all the works of service.³¹ Notice that work

³⁰The Greek term for “equipping” (“καταρτισμὸν”—noun accusative singular) means to make ready, to be prepared. In this context, the emphasis will be upon God distributing the gifts that will in turn prepare the saints to minister to the saints. Saints will always need the ministry of Godly pastors and teachers preparing them for the work of ministry. Pastors and teachers will always need the ministry of the saints to them so that they may continue to use their gifts to the glory of God; e.g., Philemon 1:13.

³¹The Greek word for “work” (“ἔργον”) means labor and toil. In 1 Corinthians 3:15, the “work” (“ἔργον”) of believers will be the basis of reward, after being tested with fire. In 1 Corinthians 9:1, Paul refers to the Corinthians as his work in the Lord, indicating Paul preached the gospel to them and they believed; subsequently, he discipled them in Christ Jesus. We also have the

consists of service.³² We use our spiritual gifts as servants of Jesus Christ, Who baptized us in the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit empowers us, we use our spiritual gifts to perform the work of service among the saints and to the world. Saints perform the work of service to the saints, not just pastors. When pastors fail to equip the saints for the work of service, the local assembly of believers may grow in numbers, but all you may have is a cattle herd milling about a pen, just seeking the next meal. In contrast, when the pastor properly and spiritually performs the equipping of the saints so that the saints can perform the work of service, you now have harvesters, disciplers, fellowshippers, and worshipers using their gifts to the glory of God. In our age of internet, phones, and varied media platforms, the temptation to focus upon one man's preaching ministry multiplies The Pastoral Heresy. The problem does not lie with the technology, but rather with the failure to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ.

The Building Up

Notice too that the equipping of the saints for the work of service produces the building up of the Body of Christ.³³ If you see a local assembly

confidence that Christ will perfect the work (“ἔργον”) which He began in us until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

³²The Greek term for “deacony” (“διακονίας”) has been the center of the teaching of Jesus to His disciples concerning leadership. As we studied previously, we have seen that Jesus told His disciples that true leadership means that you become a servant. Furthermore, Jesus illustrated that principle by saying the He came to serve, not to be served by others, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

³³The Greek word for “building up” (“οικοδομῆν”) means to build up, to edify, to cause spiritual growth. In Ephesians 4:16 we see the members of the Body of Christ (the local believers primarily) “building up” each other in Christ. Likewise, in Ephesians 4:29 the believers speak words to each other that “build up” one another in Christ. In the sweep of Ephesians 4, we see

filled with immature believers, who do not share their faith often, who do not actively disciple new believers, and who have little fellowship with other believers, and do not worship in spirit and in truth, and do not gather together to break bread, then you are looking at a fellowship where the pastor is not equipping the saints for the work of ministry. You are looking at The Pastoral Heresy. You may see large crowds, but are saints equipped to do the work of ministry?

“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:13

Unity of the Faith

In Ephesians 4:13 we see that The Pastoral Heresy impedes the unity of the faith. Jesus established a lofty goal for believers. First, Jesus said that His children, the believers, would only attain to the unity³⁴ of the faith through the proper ministry of all the gifts being utilized by all the believers. The basic

then that the “building up” of believers comes from the ministry of other believers, not just the work of the shepherd ministering to the flock.

³⁴The Greek term for “unity” “ἐνότητα” means literally “oneness” or unity or unison. The only other use of the same word in the New Testament occurs in Ephesians 4:3 where Paul emphasized the “unity” of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In that verse, God commands believers to be diligent to preserve that bond of peace. Notice even there the believers themselves, not the leadership, must act to preserve unity in the Body of Christ.

concept involves bringing very different people together to form one organic body. As Paul so perfectly illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12, Jesus only has one body, composed of many different members, with different ministries using different spiritual gifts, but all with one goal and one result: the building up of the Body of Christ, to the glory of God. Notice too that the unity flows from faith. The common faith of the believers in the Body of Christ produces unity. Doctrinal discord attacks the unity of the Body of Christ. We must all base our beliefs and practice upon the Bible, the Word of God. “What” people teach will always be more important than “who” teaches it. A persuasive voice or foreign accent should make no difference to whether you accept the teaching of a man. If the teacher explains the Word of God accurately, listen to him. If not, silence him.³⁵ In all cases, examine everything carefully, and hold on to the good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The Knowledge of the Son of God.

In Ephesians 4:13 The Pastoral Heresy appears as an attack upon the knowledge of the Son of God. As we continue in Ephesians 4:13, we see that unity and knowledge go hand in hand within the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ does not depend upon one teacher behind the pulpit, but upon every gifted teacher using the gift within them to the glory of God. You may remember Diotrephes in 3 John. Diotrephes was a prime example of The Pastoral Heresy. He loved to be first in the church (3 John 9).³⁶ John warned the believers about Diotrephes because he used wicked words.³⁷ Diotrephes

³⁵In Titus 1:11 Paul taught Titus that empty talkers and deceivers must be “silenced” because they were upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for sordid gain.

³⁶The Greek term for “loves to be first” (“φιλοπρωτεύων”) means that he strives to be first in the assembly, and known as the first leader in the church.

³⁷The Greek term for “wicked words” (“πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν”) means that Diotrephes made verbal attacks upon John and the apostles. Notice that Diotrephes rebelled against the teaching of the apostles. Diotrephes

forbade believers from receiving the brethren. Diotrephes put people out of the church who defied his orders. Diotrephes, by his behavior, exemplifies The Pastoral Heresy in full bloom.

The Mature Man

In Ephesians 4:13 The Pastoral Heresy inhibits spiritual maturity. As we have seen above, unity and the knowledge of the Son of God result from the proper administration of the spiritual gifts within the Body of Christ, His church. That means that every believer has been equipped by the pastors to use their gifts to the glory of God. Without this equipping ministry, then the believers do not attain to proper unity, they falter in their knowledge of the Son of God, and do not grow in spiritual maturity. Full spiritual maturity means that you attain to the fullness³⁸ of the stature of Christ. Unless every believer develops and uses their spiritual gifts in harmony with all the other believers, then we will all suffer deficits of maturity. If a pastor thinks that he must be the primary preacher, teacher and leader, and administrator in the local assembly, then he will not be viewing all the other members of the local assembly as essential to the ministry of Jesus Christ in his community. The Pastoral Heresy rests upon the lie that only the Pastor, Priest, Pope, Apostle, Bishop (pick your title) can really do the ministry in the church. So often people conclude that a pastor has been ordained, and therefore they are clergy. In their minds, the clergy must be very special people called of God.

despised the knowledge they gave to others through the revelation they received from God and taught to others.

³⁸The Greek term for “fullness” (“πληρώματος”) means in this context to bring to completion as in Romans 11:25 speaking of the fullness of the Gentiles eventually coming to salvation, while Israel has suffered a partial hardening—all within God’s plan.

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The New Testament contains nothing about “clergy” or “laity.”³⁹ Elders lead the local assembly and have charge over the believers, but they must give account to God. Yet, no one calls the entire group of elders the clergy. In contrast to this false distinction between clergy and laity, the Bible teaches that all believers have spiritual gifts, and all believers with their gifts deserve honor. The gifted believers carry out the ministry of Christ, not the clergy. In fact, every believer is both (1) a holy priest who offers spiritual sacrifices to God; and (2) a royal priest who proclaims the excellencies of Christ who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:4-10). I chuckle when people tell me they have been called into “the ministry.” Every believer has been called into the ministry, full time. God gave believers spiritual gifts to use for His glory and to do the work of ministry. Whenever I hear someone say they have been called into the ministry, I suspect they have fallen prey to The Pastoral Heresy and I hope they do not harm the flock they seek to help. Until we view all believers as priests, anointed ministers of God, and called to full time ministry, then The Pastoral Heresy will thrive in the community of Christ.

³⁹The New American Standard Bible (1995) translates some Old Testament (Hebrew) words as “layman.” In Leviticus 22:12, for example, the translators rendered the word “stranger” (“גֵּר”) as “layman.” Obviously in that context, they tried to distinguish a Levitical priest from non-priests. In the New Testament, all believers are both saints and priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Therefore, no special class of “clergy” existed, because all believers were priests.

4

The Every Wind of Doctrine Problem

In Ephesians 4:14 Paul also revealed that The Pastoral Heresy causes spiritual children, immature in their faith, to suffer through every wind of doctrine, tossed about by waves and winds, driven by the false doctrine of tricky men and their deceitful scheming.

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

Ephesians 4:14

Spiritual Children

In Ephesians 4:14 the Holy Spirit explained that proper spiritual growth in Christ eliminates problems spread by false teachers. Paul wrote that because of the proper use of spiritual gifts resulting from believers being adequately equipped by pastors and teachers for the work of ministry, the believers are no longer immature spiritual children. The path to spiritual maturity has been paved in the hearts of believers by faithful pastors and

teachers using their gifts to help the other saints mature, so that all the saints perform the work of ministry daily and continuously. The Pastoral Heresy promotes immaturity in the Body of Christ, and immature Christians fall prey to false teachers.

“tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,”

Ephesians 4:15

Tossed by Waves, Carried about by Every Wind of Doctrine

In Ephesians 4:14 the Holy Spirit employed very graphic images to describe the immature believers. He likened them to waves, carried here and there by the wind.⁴⁰ Notice that the waves drive them and push them. In contrast, Jesus walked upon the waves and they did not disturb Him. When immature believers encounter the winds and waves caused by false teachers, those false doctrines toss them and drive them away from Christ. Jesus knows the power of false doctrines. When we start to believe false doctrines, the lies of the devil, then we feel uneasy spiritually, or we may be completely deluded into a sense of happiness. Our spiritual lives, however, may be very stormy inside, as we believe lies and fly up and down as the swells of doctrine push up and down. In contrast, the true doctrine of Christ will always provide strength and comfort from God, with peace that surpasses human understanding.

⁴⁰In Mark 6:55 people heard about the healing power of Jesus. As a result, people placed the sick on pallets and carried them (“περιφέρειν”) to Jesus.

“by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

Ephesians 4:14

Trickery and Craftiness in Deceitful Scheming

In Ephesians 4:14 the Holy Spirit pinpointed evil men who used trickery⁴¹ and craftiness⁴² in deceitful schemes⁴³ to carry away young believers into doctrinal errors. Every young believer needs to know that people in the church will try to teach them false doctrine about Jesus Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The Pastoral Heresy only ensures that such false teachers will be able to deceive the immature and carry them away because the immature do not use their spiritual gifts for the work of ministry and so languish under the storms and waves of false teaching. Notice too that

⁴¹The Greek word for “trickery” (“κυβεία”) is a rare word meaning trickery, craftiness, and the use of guile.

⁴²The Greek word for “craftiness” (“πανουργία”) means to be cunning and crafty. In 1 Corinthians 3:19, God indicates that He will catch the wise in their craftiness. Likewise in 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul indicated that he never walked in craftiness regarding the word of God. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, the devil deceived Eve by his craftiness.

⁴³The Greek phrase for “deceitful schemes” (“μεθοδείαν τῆς πλάνης”) emphasized that the evil men assembled entire schemes, and not just isolated events or single temptations. We must be careful to remember that entire schemes, among many people, with multiple evil plans, have been laid to entrap the righteous.

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these evil men with make deliberate plans to mislead the believers and keep others from coming to saving faith in the Jesus Christ.

5

The Truth Problem

In Ephesians 4:15 we see that in contrast to the false teachers, all believers must speak the truth to each other in love. The ministry of the saints using their spiritual gifts will normally involve speaking out loud, with words, in addition to actions.

“but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,”

Ephesians 4:15

Speaking the Truth in Love

In Ephesians 4:15 as believers both individually and corporately mature in Christ, they grow out of immaturity and learn about using their words to promote maturity. Paul wrote that believers must be “speaking the truth in love.”⁴⁴ Paul frequently emphasized the priority of love in all things,

⁴⁴The Greek word for “speaking the truth” (“ἀληθεύοντες”) emphasizes the present and persistent activity of speaking the truth, faithfully telling the truth; the term occurs in the “we” form—that means that we all as believers speak the truth while bringing maturity to the other members of the body by properly using our spiritual gifts. The Greek phrase for “in love” (“ἐν ἀγάπῃ”) further describes how we speak to one another in the Body of

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such as loving God and loving your neighbor. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul explained the priority of love in the proper functioning of the spiritual gifts and proclaimed that love is greater than faith and hope.

Christ. Consider the difference between “I speak the truth in love” and “We all speak the truth in love.”

6

Do Not Touch the Lord's Anointed

I frequently encounter people who say: “Do not criticize the pastor.” Some believers think their pastor is the king of the church, and he should be afforded royal treatment at every point. In fact, every believer is a member of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Some believers act as if their pastors are the only people anointed by God in the entire congregation.

“So he said to his men, ‘Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD’s anointed.’”

1 Samuel 24:6

People using the titles Pastor, Teacher, Rabbi, Senior Pastor, Reverend, Bishop, Prophet, and similar titles often teach that they are the anointed person of God and no one should touch them. Yet, such people completely ignore the use of that phrase in the Bible. In 1 Samuel 24:6 David did not permit his men or himself to touch King Saul for harm, because the Lord had anointed Saul to be king. Notice in 1 Samuel 24 that God spoke of physical protection for the Lord’s anointed. So, to apply this phrase “Do not

touch the Lord's anointed" means that someone is claiming to be the King of Israel. Of course, many pastors think of themselves as the king of their church, and completely ignore the teaching of Christ. You know you are looking at The Pastoral Heresy when the pastor of your church thinks of himself as the Lord's anointed king, above criticism, and above anyone questioning his leadership or his actions. In contrast, the Bible records that King Saul was God's anointed, but Samuel confronted King Saul and King Saul's evil deeds, even though King Saul was anointed of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:1-35). Therefore, no one can claim that "Touch not the Lord's anointed" ever meant that you do not rebuke and correct a king, who happened to be the Lord's anointed. Furthermore, Nathan the prophet confronted King David, also anointed of the Lord, about King David's great sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-25). King David repented of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, and King David's conspiracy to murder of Uriah.

You may have heard someone warn you with the phrase: 'Do not touch My anointed ones and do My prophets no harm' (Psalm 105:15). If anyone ever tries to apply this passage to their Pastor as the "anointed one" of God to lead his people, be sure to remind them of the context of that verse. The verse actually focused upon "anointed ones," referring to the entire people of God, Israel. In the New Testament, we learn that every believer has received an anointing from the Father, and that anointing teaches us all things (1 John 2:27). Therefore, the next time you hear that so and so is an anointed preacher, singer, or apostle, remember that all believers are anointed in the New Testament; it just seems like some people have not read the Bible. So, if anyone ever says to you, "Do not stretch out your hand against the Lord's anointed" and refers to any pastor, teacher, rabbi, etc. in the church, then you know that person has succumbed to The Pastoral Heresy. Well, what about the role of pastors and elders within the local assembly?

7

The Office of Overseer and the Spiritual Gift of Pastor

Many believers assume that the term “Pastor” and “Elder” mean the same thing. In some cases, pastors promote themselves as the only “Elder” within a local assembly. Many people advance The Pastoral Heresy by failing to understand the proper roles of “Church Overseers” and “elders.” We must study the Word of God to distinguish the Church Office of Overseer from the elders, The Spiritual Gift of Shepherd, The Spiritual Gift of the Leaders, and The Spiritual Gift of Navigations. We cannot fully develop these differences within the scope of this article (see [New Testament Leadership](#)), but we can outline some of the highlights, sufficient to expose more roots of The Pastoral Heresy.

The New Testament Church Offices

The New Testament refers to three (and perhaps more) Church Offices: (1) Apostle; (2) Overseer; and (3) Deacons. For our limited purpose of understanding The Pastoral Heresy, we will look briefly at the Church Overseers and Church Deacons and elders to see how they should function within the church. In passing, we must note the “Deacons” hold a spiritual office in the church, and so they must meet spiritual qualifications to be in charge of a spiritual ministry. Please keep in mind that the seven men in Acts 6:5 were men full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. They were put in charge of the task of being sure that the Hellenistic Jews and Hellenistic widows were

served food properly. Notice that we see no indication that any of those seven men ever served a single table. Instead, we do see that Stephen had a vital preaching ministry, which resulted in his martyrdom (Acts 7:1-60) and Philip preached in Samaria (Acts 8:4-40); he was later known as Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8-9). So often today people have no idea what a deacon did in the New Testament. Among other spiritual activities, they were known as preachers and evangelists.

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Acts 20:28

Overseers

In Acts 20:28 Paul addressed a group of men from Ephesus as part of his farewell tour before leaving for Jerusalem. Paul knew that they would no longer see his face (Acts 20:25). Paul described a group of believers attending the local assembly at Ephesus as “overseers.”⁴⁵ These “overseers” had very

⁴⁵The Greek term for “overseers” (“ἐπισκόπους”) means what it says—these men were looking over the flock.

specific duties. First, they had to be on guard for (a) themselves and (b) for all the flock of God.⁴⁶ Second, they had to shepherd the church of God.⁴⁷

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,”

Titus 1:5

⁴⁶The Greek term for “be on guard” (“προσέχετε”) means to be vigilant, watchful, careful. It conveys the sense of spiritual acuity and spiritual perception.

⁴⁷The Greek term for “shepherd” (“ποιμαίνειν”) is a present active infinitive, which in this case describes the work of the “overseers” as taking care of the flock of believers. The only other occurrence of the term in the infinitive is Revelation 12:5, which speaks of Christ Who is “to shepherd” (“ποιμαίνειν”) the nations with a rod of iron (compare Revelation 2:27) where Jesus rules to crush the vessels of the potter, which He breaks into pieces, because Jesus has received such authority from His Father—see Luke 19:27. While Jesus, in the future, shepherds the nations with a rod of iron, today He shepherds His flock with compassion (Mark 6:34), and instructed the apostles and elders to shepherd the flock with eagerness, providing examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Elders

In Titus 1:5 Paul directed Titus to set down elders into the Church Office of Overseer in every city in Crete, as Paul had instructed. Notice the use of the plural here, indicating more than one Church Overseer per local assembly. Not all elders are Church Overseers. A group of Church Overseers should serve, not just one man. This term “elders” here indicated that Titus should set down some men who were already elders and place them into the Church Office of Overseer. These elders set down in the Church Office of Overseer held a special church office.⁴⁸ Some people compare the term “overseer” in Titus 1:7 with the term “elder” in Titus 1:5 and conclude wrongly that the terms “overseer” and “elder” are interchangeable. They overlook that Philippians 1:1 only recognized the Church Office of Overseers and the Church Office of Deacons. Furthermore, the Bible provides specific qualifications for Church Overseers in Titus 1:7-9 which seem to be identical to qualities of a “Church Overseer” in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. We understand that a person may aspire to be hold the Church Office of Overseer (1 Timothy 3:1), but the Bible never describes an office of Church Elder or its function. Instead, the Bible describes elders in both the Old Testament and New Testament, but they are mature believers and are never described as a church office. Some elders are set down into the Body of Christ as Church Overseers, but elders remain a separate group of people in both Testaments with important functions. Therefore, while Church Overseers perform the work of shepherds (Acts 20:28), this does not mean every shepherd holds the Office of Church Overseer. All elders function as under-shepherds of Christ (1 Peter 5:1-4). Such claims confuse The Spiritual Gift of Shepherds with the Office of Church Overseer and the elders of the church. The office of overseer was well

⁴⁸Please take note that the term “elders” in the New Testament may refer to old men, forefathers, members of the Sanhedrin, and other uses. In this study, we are looking only at the church office designated by the term “Elder.”

known in the Old Testament and Judas Iscariot held the office of apostle, distinct from The Spiritual Gift of Apostle. As in Acts 20:28, The Holy Spirit set elders in the church to shepherd the church of God. Notice that “shepherd” is not an office, but the work of shepherding that Church Overseers perform for the church.

“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,”

1 Peter 5:1

Exhortation to Elders

Now, turning to 1 Peter 5:1-4, we learn that Peter exhorted the “elders” among those believers scattered as aliens all over the world.⁴⁹ We must learn from this verse that each local assembly has “elders” among the people. The elders Peter had in mind were scattered among the flock. They were not centralized, giving orders to churches in other places.⁵⁰ Peter exhorted the elders among the believers as: (a) a fellow elder; and (b) a witness of the sufferings of Christ; and (c) a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. Peter had three distinct points to make here with those descriptions. First, he was a fellow elder. In this case, Peter worked with the Jerusalem church, but considered himself a “fellow elder” of all the elders laboring in Pontus,

⁴⁹The Greek phrase “among you” (“ἐν ὑμῖν”) indicates in this context that the “elders” were in local assemblies or among the local believers.

⁵⁰The Greek term for “elders” (“Πρεσβυτέρους”) seems here to designate a group of mature saints, but the Church Office of Overseer does not appear in this passage, except that all Church Overseers were first elders and continued to be elders.

The Pastoral Heresy

Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.⁵¹ Second, Peter also described himself as a witness to the sufferings of Christ, a common identification of the twelve apostles (Acts 1:21-22), and by implication his authority as an apostle of Christ. Third, Peter identified himself as a partaker of the glory to be revealed. He focused upon his present salvation and tied it to the glory to be revealed in the future. Peter brought the glorious future into the present life of the elders upon earth.

Peter emphasized the way that elders must act as one of the flock, serving under the rulership and authority of Christ, who calls Himself the Chief Shepherd. Peter also refers to Jesus as the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. Jesus saved the sheep, like us, who were continually straying like sheep. Shepherds must have the heart and desires of Jesus Christ and perform their ministry by following His leadings. Jesus Christ must always be the Chief Shepherd of every congregation, and worshipped as the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. Jesus reserves these titles to Himself.

“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.”

1 Peter 5:2

⁵¹The Greek term for “fellow elder” (“συμπρεσβύτερος”) means here that Peter considered himself one of their number and not superior in rank. In another words, he was not asserting a greater stature, but appealing to them as one of them, elder to elder. Peter held the Church Office of Apostle, but did not describe himself as a Church Overseer. He chose the term elder.

Shepherd the Flock

Having laid the basis of his appeal to his fellow elders, Peter then gave them specific instructions about how to live and work for Christ as elders. Peter did not claim a greater authority here, but presented himself as a fellow elder, speaking as one of them. Some churches seek to exalt Peter as the greatest of the apostles, but such efforts must fail, in part because of passages like this appeal as a fellow elder. Elders must: (a) shepherd the flock of God among them;⁵² and (2) do so without compulsion, but voluntarily.⁵³ The elders must also avoid all [sordid gain](#), meaning that they must not let wealth

⁵²The Greek term for “shepherd” (“ποιμάνετε”) has the same root word as Paul used to describe the work of the “Overseers” in Ephesus in Acts 20:28. Yet, this similarity does not prove that all shepherds hold the Office of Overseer. It does prove that all elders have oversight duties as part of their shepherding. Please notice that the aorist imperative verb ποιμάνετε relates directly to the perfect passive participle, masculine nominative plural ἐπισκοποῦντες, linking the shepherding work of elders with the oversight work of the elders. Furthermore, in 1 Peter 1:5 the use of the phrase Ὁμοίως νεώτεροι contrasts younger saints with the elder saints in the preceding verses. The younger saints must be in submission (“ὑποτάγητε”) to the elders (“πρεσβυτέρους”). Therefore, Peter demonstrated that elders have oversight duties, including the work of shepherding and oversight of the congregation, who should submit to them. Because the point in Titus 1:5 is that some elders were set into the Church Office of Overseer, it naturally fits in 1 Peter 5 that all elders do shepherding and oversight work. Only elders hold the Church Office of Overseer, but not all elders hold the Church Office of Overseer. Remember that Paul only recognized the Church Overseers and Church Deacons in Philippians 1 and Paul only provided qualifications for Church Overseers and Church Deacons. No qualifications are required for a saint to become an elder.

⁵³The Greek word for “compulsion” (“ἀναγκαστῶς”) means not under duress or force; compare those compelled to come to the dinner from the highways and byways to fill the house (Luke 14:23).

become their master.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the elders should not lord it over those allotted to their charge.⁵⁵ As Jesus taught His twelve disciples, they must never lord their authority over the flock, because Jesus alone has all the authority in heaven and on earth.⁵⁶ Instead, they must be servants who lead, without lording their authority over the flock. Jesus has all the authority in heaven and earth, and He commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all the world. As part of that mission, they were also to appoint elders who would serve Christ first, and then under His direction, be servants of all.

For Peter, following Christ meant obeying the commission of Jesus: “Shepherd My sheep” (John 21:16). Jesus linked the shepherding command to Peter with Peter’s love for Jesus: “If you love Me?”⁵⁷ Jesus described the

⁵⁴Jesus warned against serving two masters, God and wealth. Jesus preached that people must decide to serve one or the other, because they cannot serve both (Matthew 6:24). Jesus also taught that servants cannot serve both wealth and God, because you will always despise the one and love the other. You simply cannot have it both ways, even as a believer (Luke 16:13).

⁵⁵The Greek term for “lord it over” (“κατακυριεύοντες”) shares the same root word as the term used in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42; in both of those passages, the disciples were discussing who was the greatest among them, but Jesus commanded them to avoid the Gentile practice of lording authority over others.

⁵⁶In Matthew 20:25-27 Jesus explained that the Gentile’s rulers lord it over them, and exercise authority over them. But Jesus commanded His disciples to be servants, not lords (See also Matthew 28:18: all authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth, and so He sends the disciples in His name).

⁵⁷Jesus first asked Peter if he loved Jesus more than these. Then Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me?” (“ἀγαπᾷς με;”) Finally, Jesus asked Peter: “Do you love me?” (“φιλεῖς με;”). Jesus tied Peter’s love with the commission to shepherd the flock (John 21:15-17).

life work of Peter with those simple words. Jesus also commanded Peter to tend His lambs (John 21:15).

“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

1 Timothy 5:17

Plurality of Elders

In 1 Timothy 5:17 we read about the elders who lead well.⁵⁸ Those elders who lead well should be given double honor.⁵⁹ Notice that the term “elders” is plural and so indicates that each local assembly of believers should have a number of elders, not just one. Furthermore, we learn from 1 Timothy 5:17 that not all elders work hard at teaching and preaching. We know that one qualification for being a Church Overseer is that the man must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). Some elders will have other primary ministries, such as exercising church leadership, without preaching and teaching. Consider The Spiritual Gift of the Leaders for a moment. In Romans 12:8 we

⁵⁸The Greek word for “lead” (“προεστῶτες”) should not be confused with rule or manage. See 1 Timothy 3:12 (“προϊστάμενοι”) for leadership at home 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (“προϊσταμένους”) for leadership in the church.

⁵⁹The Greek word for “honor” (“τιμῆς”) means the purchase price, such as the amount that Abraham paid for the tomb he bought from the sons of Hamor (Acts 7:16; we see the same term used to describe the payment Jesus made to purchase us (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Corinthians 7:23).

read that “he who leads, with diligence.” We see that “leadership” is a distinct spiritual gift because it appears separately in the list of gifts (see the study of the [Spiritual Gift of The Leaders](#)). Hopefully, every group of elders at a local church has someone who has the spiritual gift of leadership to provide guidance and vision for the future of the various ministries. In contrast to the one-man style of leadership prominent in many churches today, Jesus taught that the local assembly should have a plurality of preachers and teachers, and the leadership would be provided by men with that specific spiritual gift of leading.

“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Acts 6:3

Deacons

While Paul directed that Titus appoint elders as Church Overseers in young assemblies, some new assemblies may not have had deacons.⁶⁰ Please note that the “Deacons” hold a spiritual office in the church, and so they must meet spiritual qualifications to be in charge of a spiritual ministry. The seven men in Acts 6:5 were men full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ Deacons do

⁶⁰Compare Titus 1:5-9 with 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

⁶¹Some people teach that Acts 6 may not refer to the office of Deacon. They cite Acts 6:4 to show that “deacony” (“διακονία”) refers to the work of the twelve apostles; then they cite Acts 6:2 to show that the work for the deacons would be “to deacon” (“διακονεῖν”) tables. They also argue that

not have to be elders in the congregation, but apparently only elders may become Church Overseers. They were put in charge of the task of being sure that the Hellenistic Jews and Hellenistic widows were served food properly. Notice that the seven had duties to be in charge of the task, not performing the task of deaconing the tables. Instead, we do see that Stephen had a vital preaching ministry, which resulted in his martyrdom (Acts 7:1-60) and Philip preached in Samaria (Acts 8:4-40); later known as Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8-9)—named as “one of the seven” deacons). In many churches today, we see one pastor, who calls himself the elder, and then a group of deacons, often there to support the pastor in his work. In many cases, the deacons essentially serve under the pastor, who thinks he is automatically the chairman of the board of deacons. In the New Testament, both Church Overseers and Church Deacons have important spiritual qualifications. Furthermore, as we have seen above, The Spiritual Gift of The Shepherds is distinct from the Office of Church Overseer and the Church Office of Deacon. Therefore, many denominational groups do not follow the New Testament practice of a plurality of elders. Because the pupil will become like the master, so the local church should have a plurality of elders to learn from. When it comes to deacons, many believers have no idea what deacons should do in a local assembly. So often today people have no idea the deacons were known as preachers and evangelists. Yet, deacons have a vital role to play as officers in the local church, put in charge of specific important ministries to the local assembly. To highlight the plurality of ministry within the local church, let us take a closer look at the Spiritual Gift of Shepherd.

many New Testament authors use the term “serve” to describe serving food. For example, Peter’s mother-in-law deaconed the disciples (Luke 4:39); and the deacons at the wedding in Cana served the wedding guests (John 2:5, 9). Many other examples could be cited. Yet, in Acts 21:8, Philip is identified as “one of the seven,” apparently referring to the seven men in Acts 6, which seems similar to the phrase “the twelve,” referring to the twelve apostles (Acts 6:2; 1 Corinthians 15:5).

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers,”

Ephesians 4:11

The Spiritual Gift of Shepherd

In Ephesians 4:11 we read about the distinct spiritual gifts of “shepherds” and “teachers.”⁶² Therefore, we may understand that not all shepherds are teachers. Yet, all Church Overseers should be able to teach, but this requirement does not mean that every Church Overseer has to have The Spiritual Gift of The Teachers. These distinct spiritual gifts help us understand the work of “shepherds,” and how not all shepherds hold the Office of Church Overseer.⁶³ We should be careful to remember that every

⁶²As above, some people may argue that the terms “shepherds” and “teachers” refer to the same individual or gifts, or that one individual always has both gifts. In support, they often cite the Granville Sharp rule of New Testament Greek grammar holding that two nouns connected by “and” (“καί”) refer to the same thing. The problem with this approach is that Granville Sharp limited his rule to singular nouns, not plural nouns as found here in Ephesians 4:11. It seems that these gifts here do not refer to the same person who is always a shepherd and a teacher.

⁶³Some people argue that Titus 1:7 refers to a singular “bishop” or “overseer” in that local assembly. They ignore the Greek grammar controlling the article (“τὸν”). The context in Titus 1:5 certainly indicates more than one elder in every city was appointed to the Office of Church Overseer. Moreover, the New Testament authors frequently used the article generically, meaning a class of things, and not just one individual item

Church Overseer (and elders) must perform the work of a shepherd regarding the care of the flock, but not every elder has The Spiritual Gift of The Shepherds or holds the Church Office of Overseer, just like every elder does not have The Spiritual Gift of The Teachers. I pray that every group of Church Overseers and elders has a male with The Spiritual Gift of The Leaders and The Spiritual Gift of Navigations. It would also be nice to have a Church Overseer with The Spiritual Gift of the Evangelists. We could all wish for a group of Church Overseers with a variety of spiritual gifts to provide leadership and pastoral care to the local assembly. Please recall, however, that the basic point is that the local assembly of all believers carry out the work of ministry, using their spiritual gifts, and neither the pastor nor the elders nor the Church Overseers perform all the work of ministry. Consider for a moment 1 Thessalonians 5:14. In that verse, Paul commanded the entire congregation of believers at Thessalonica to perform three ministries to the other saints: (1) admonish the unruly; and (2) encourage the fainthearted; and (3) help the weak. In addition, all the saints must be patient with one another, especially when performing their ministries. Therefore, the saints use their spiritual gifts to perform specialized and diverse ministries within the church. The shepherds and teachers equip the saints for the work of performing their individual ministries.

The entire image of the Body of Christ employed in 1 Corinthians 12 also reminds us that every member of the Body of Christ possesses different spiritual gifts, displayed in a variety of ministries, all the to glory of God (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). When we supplant Christ as the Head of the Church with any man, called pastor or elder, then we have fallen into The Pastoral Heresy. In some cases, the “pastor” truly believes that no one in the local assembly has the interest and qualifications to serve as an elder. In his mind, the “pastor” then steps forward leading the church in all areas. In some cases,

(Matthew 12:35; Luke 10:7; John 2:25). Likewise, Paul used the article in a generic sense to refer to elders in 1 Timothy 3:2, not just to identify one elder who ruled the local assembly.

the “pastor” ignores the “elders” and “deacons,” and they say nothing. In all cases, the Lord Jesus provided for a plurality of elders leading the church, with a variety of gifts.

“I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”

3 John 1:9

The Problem of One Man Leadership

As you can see from the preceding section, the New Testament never promoted or recognized a one-man style of church ministry. In 3 John, a man named Diotrephes imposed his will upon the entire congregation for evil. He loved to be first among the brethren in the local assembly. He even set himself above John the apostle and author of the Book (3 John 1:9). Diotrephes also accused John the apostle with wicked words. Diotrephes further refused to accept the brethren, but put them out of the church. When Diotrephes arises, the elders should call upon him to repent, and to impose proper discipline upon him. Without elders fulfilling their obligations to silence such men that upset entire families, the church will suffer (Titus 1:10-11; Titus 3:10).

Paul always traveled with a team, just as the Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas for their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2; compare, for example, Philippians 1:1 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1). As above, Paul wrote Titus to set down elders (plural) into the Church Office of Overseers in every city. This plurality of leadership in the New Testament will safeguard against The Pastoral Heresy by limiting the desire to be the greatest among the flock. The pastor will no longer be the sole focus of attention, and he may not be the

The Pastoral Heresy

only preacher in the church. In fact, all the elders and Church Overseers, ideally, will be known for their strong work of serving the local saints, and some of them will work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

8

Conclusion

The Pastoral Heresy has grown deep roots in the local assemblies today. Believers have overlooked that no man should be known as the greatest in any local assembly, but rather the Lord Jesus Christ should be recognized always as the Chief Shepherd. Everyone else in the entire assembly has special spiritual gifts that will produce unity and maturity in the Body of Jesus Christ, His Church. When any man begins to assume titles like “Pastor,” “Father,” “Teacher,” “Rabbi,” or “Leader,” then you know that person has fallen into The Pastoral Heresy. Furthermore, the local assembly that fails to rebuke all such people who use such terms also has fallen into The Pastoral Heresy. Such anti-Christian titles today are so commonplace that practically no one minds those titles, but virtually everyone seems to embrace and promote The Pastoral Heresy by using such terms. The only remedy to The Pastoral Heresy will be to eliminate not only the titles, but also the one-man style of leadership, and return to the Word of God to appoint a plurality of elders and Church Overseers in every church, and then equip the saints for the work of ministry. As we all work together, using our spiritual gifts to the glory of God, then The Pastoral Heresy will be relegated solely to history, and a heresy eliminated by the power of Jesus Christ cleansing His church. Until then, we must all strive to implement the teachings of the Word of God in humility and love, as we pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify all believers in all our ways. Jesus promised to build His church and we should always count upon Him to be the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

HALLELUJAH !