

Reforming the Evangelical Pastorate, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

Well, I'd like to begin this session by reading the main text we're going to examine. So turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, it's a, really a vital text on pastoral ministry. This is a message that is themed around reforming the evangelical pastorates. Paul was the quintessential pastor, the young church at Thessalonica, an exemplary church. These verses describe for us a shepherding model that ought to set the standard for all pastors in all churches.

Take a look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 1, "For you yourselves know brothers that our coming to you is not in vain. But though we had already suffered, and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God, in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error, or impurity, or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be

entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not to please man, but to please God, who tests our hearts.

"For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor were the pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor do we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as Apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you'd become very dear to us.

"For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom in glory."

How do today's mega churches, multi-site churches, this aberration called the online church, which is really contradiction in terms, how do these organizations, these modern church models and those who lead them, practice what Paul describes in that passage? In many cases, I believe the reality is that they don't. They don't practice this model of shepherding those aspiring after mega, multi-site, online church models, and you don't have to be a mega church in order to have a mega church mentality and aspire to be one.

But those aspiring after all that, have decidedly rejected this text. They're not interested in what Paul describes here, because it gets them into the weeds so much that they can't build their huge platform. You can only do so much with, we all have 24 hours in a day, so with the time and energy that they have, they've gotta make a choice.

Andy Stanley is the son of well-known Pastor Charles Stanley, and he leads one of these mega, multi-site, online churches in Atlanta, Georgia called North Point Community Church, around 35,000 people. The younger Stanley's personal website says that he is a communicator, an author, and a pastor.

I have no quibble at all with those first two descriptions. But I dispute that last title, Pastor.

Because he lifted that title from its original biblical context and without any warrant he has redefined it culturally, reshaped it according to his own needs and purposes, pragmatically and he's usurped this title for his own ends. Communicator and author is not going to build him a big audience in the evangelical Christian community. So Pastor has to be in there because it gives him some mark of credibility. Periodical called the "Leadership Journal" put out by *Christianity Today*, published an interview with Andy Stanley called 'Get it Done Leadership' in which they pitched six questions to pastor Stanley.

The interviewer asked him, "What is distinctively spiritual about the kind of leadership you do?" His reply was candid "There's nothing distinctly spiritual." True. And then this, "One of the criticisms I get is your church is so corporate. I read blogs all the time." Another problem, "Bloggers complain, this pastor's like a CEO and I say, okay, you're right. Now why is that a bad model?" When his interviewer asked, "Should we

stop talking about pastors as shepherds?" His response was brazen.

"Absolutely, that word needs to go away. Jesus talked about shepherds, because there was one over there and a pasture he could point to, but to bring that imagery today and say, Pastor, you're the shepherd of the flock. No, I've never seen a flock." It's probably true as well. "I've never spent five minutes with a shepherd." Probably also true. "It was culturally relevant in the time of Jesus, but it's not culturally relevant anymore." This is Andy Stanley, continuing, "Nothing works in our culture with that model, except this sense of the gentle pastoral care. Obviously, that is a face of church ministry. But that's not leadership." End quote.

The interviewer pushed back a little bit. "Isn't Shepherd, the biblical word for Pastor?" And he replied, "That's the first century word. If Jesus were here today, would he talk about shepherds? No. He would point to something that we all know. And we'd say, oh, yeah, I know what that is." You see how man centered this line of thinking is?

He continues, "Jesus told Peter the fisherman to feed my sheep. But he didn't say to the rest of them, go ye therefore into all the world and be shepherds and feed my sheep. By the time of the book of Acts, the shepherded model is gone." End quote. Such a cavalier attitude, toward the pastorate, toward biblical things, but that is the attitude that will build a mega, multi-site, online church.

That is the attitude these days that will draw big crowds because it is inherently man centered. Speak of Jesus, conforming the ministry to something we all know. He does not know Jesus. The pastorate is not about running an organization or being a visionary, or a get-it-done leadership. I want to say this in no uncertain terms to forcefully and vehemently contradict Andy Stanley, the pastorate is all about shepherding. So we better get that metaphor right. I beg to differ, with Pastor Andy Stanley.

By the time of the book of Acts, the shepherding model is not gone. Paul commanded the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "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."

Ephesians 4:11. "Christ gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry." The risen Lord Jesus, Hebrews 13:20, is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Peter exhorts his fellow elders to shepherd the flock of God that is among you, 1 Peter 5:2, "because when the chief Shepherd appears," verse 4, "You'll receive the unfading Crown of Glory."

Seems to be an aspirational model in that text. And at the very end, Revelation 7:17, "The lamb in the midst of the throne." What does it say, will be their CEO? "Will be their shepherd." And then it continues with this imagery, "And he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear away from their eyes." That is a tender picture, the heart of Christ, his desire to shepherd each individual sheep, wiping tears from eyes, he will guide them to springs of living water.

That's beautiful imagery drawn from the shepherding psalm of David, Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd who leads me beside still waters." The pastor is and he must be a shepherd. In fact, the word we translate pastor, *poimen* that is the Greek word for Shepherd. So Pastor, Shepherd that's the same thing and it, it is the perfect metaphor for leadership and I would add this all leadership.

Leadership in the home, leadership in society, leadership in the workplace, leadership in government. Points to the demands for the physical presence of the one who tends Christ sheep among that flock, visible presence. It's hard work, it's often unglamorous work. It's out in a pasture somewhere, way in the hills where no one can see you. Faithfulness is required where no one's looking.

This gritty, earthy picture is the perfect metaphor for ministry. And the more you meditate on the image itself, the more it informs you and instructs you on what leadership is really all about. It is about sacrifice for those that you lead. It is about giving yourself for others, it is not about you. But

not only that, this is the metaphor that God is going to hold every pastor accountable to.

Whether they accept it or not, they can reject it and say, That's not for me, but doesn't matter. God is still playing the same game. It's the metaphor God expects every sheep to measure his pastor by. Christians should expect to be led by a shepherd with the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not a CEO, not a stand-up comedian, not an entrepreneur, or as I've seen on one website, a pastorpreneur, not a visionary, not a life coach, not a therapist, it must be a shepherd. Don't monkey with the metaphor.

In Ezekiel 34, we find out in this passage that God is the shepherd of his sheep. And as the source of all things, he is the consummate prototype whom we must all emulate. As The Great Shepherd of his sheep, God expects every human leader whether it be a king, or a political leader, or a governor, or a priest, who is a sacerdotal leader or prophet who is a moral, ethical leader or a pastor. Every single leader is to follow the model set by the shepherding metaphor, which again reflects the shepherding heart of God.

We can hear the echo of that in Jesus' heart for the scattered sheep of his own day, as he looked out among the people. Matthew 9 verse 36, says "He saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." It grieves him. As it grieves us all, it ought to grieve us all, who have a shepherd's heart. To see these false shepherds, these hirelings, these wolves in sheep's clothing, who are fleecing the flock to feed themselves, who are building their empires on the backs of broken sheep.

While those with desperate spiritual needs go untended, uncared for, unfed, and nothing escapes God's notice. He is a just God, a compassionate God, he will bring those false shepherds, those hirelings, those wolves into judgment. For Andy Stanley and others like him, they can reject the shepherding label if they want to. They can cater to the expectations of modern consumers. But God doesn't care. He still holds them accountable as shepherds anyway, he calls Andy Stanley a shepherd, in this context, because shepherding is the standard.

That's the same imagery. It's the same metaphor. It illustrates the same heart of concern all through Jesus' ministry as well. He says twice in John 10, "I am the good shepherd." We've already heard. Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep, Hebrews 13:20. He's the chief shepherd. 1 Peter 5:4, but when restoring Peter back into ministry, Jesus told him in John 21:15 to 17, "Tend my lambs [...] shepherd my sheep [...] tend my sheep." Shepherding is the paradigm for all apostolic pastoral ministry, which means shepherding is a paradigm for today's pastors as well.

This is why Christ continues to give pastors in every local church, every true church of his, he gives them as a gift, pastors, shepherds, he gives them to his churches, so that they will shepherd the church. Ephesians 4:11, 4:12, "For the equipping of the saints, for the building up of the body of Christ, unto the unity of the faith and the maturing in Christ."

So they're no longer prey for wolves. Shepherding is never passé. In any age, it remains the standard for pastoral ministry and it is the standard against which all pastors are judged and measured. And it is in serious need of recovery for those who

are detoxing from this toxic thing called evangelicalism, that we've been describing. So with that in mind, go back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, and let's take a little closer look at this text.

1 Thessalonians chapter 2, beautiful imagery of what shepherding looks like. We'll make some observations, see some implications for pastoral ministry. Number one, pastors are first, bold preachers of God's gospel. That's how they seek the lost. That's how they bind up the wounds. That's how they seek scattered sheep. They preach God's gospel. We see this throughout the passage, but it is immediately clear in the first two verses. "For you, yourselves know brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain, though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi. As you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God, in the midst of much conflict."

Several observations to make, those couple verses. First, the main thought is in verse 2, "We had boldness in our God, to declare to you the gospel of God." That is the primary duty of every true pastor is to preach the word. No matter the social

climate, no matter the cultural ethos, no matter the political tensions. It's about preaching.

The gospel of God is paramount in the entire passage, you look ahead and see it mentioned in verse 2. Then in verse 4, also in verse 8, also in verse 9, in verse 3, Paul refers to the gospel as our appeal, which refers to the gospel call, you could probably best translate it that way as a gospel call. It's calling the Thessalonians to faith in Christ, it's exhorting them to repent and believe. If we could go back in a time machine, and listen to Paul preach this thing that he summarizes with that short phrase, "the gospel of God."

What'd that sound like? Would it sound like what we hear in most evangelical churches today? Or do you think it might sound like something different? I believe if we took Paul's gospel preaching, and tried to shoehorn it into one of these mega things, he'd be expelled. I know probably like many of your churches, our church does this for training purposes, we boil the gospel down to its bare essence, in order to teach a pattern of understanding, a pattern of thinking, with regard to teaching

Christians how to explain the gospel to others. How to have a framework in their mind about how to articulate it.

Around here, we say the gospel is about number one, the holiness of God, the revelation of his glory, his demand of perfect righteousness. It's also about number two, sinful man's need for a Savior to rescue us from God's just wrath for our sins. We escaped the just penalty of an eternal hell. The gospel is in number three, God's provision of Jesus Christ as our substitutionary atoning sacrifice for all of our sins, for all those who will believe.

And number four, this good news demands and we must repent, believe the gospel, follow Jesus Christ in obedience. We around here, often boil that down even further to four words God, man, Christ, response. But we realize that each word, in and of itself is a library of content, four words is not where we leave people. Nor is the short summary that I gave. That's not where we leave people.

Sadly, our evangelism teams, we go out on the streets and proclaim the gospel. We have met many self-identified evangelicals who attend very prominent churches in our area. They don't even recognize the boiled down version. They don't recognize the four words as even gospel-ish content. They have a sense that that makes sense. It's not because it's too little. Because it's too much.

They think, it's too demanding, too severe, talk about repentance. How exactly are they still considered evangelical? I mean, it's really, just boils down to a box they check on a George Barna or Pew Research survey, evangelical, I'm not Catholic, not Buddhist, evangelical, that's me.

Evangelicals and evangelical churches have been assuming the gospel for more than half a century now. And the longer they assume it, the more they lose it. The longer they assume it, the less they revisit it, and study it and mine out the riches. And that means, if they don't use it, they lose it. There're many, who think a perfectly sufficient gospel message goes something like this "Jesus died for your sins would you like to accept

him?" Or more simply, "Ask Jesus into your heart. Now get baptized."

There have been many who treated Jesus like a magic word that opens the gates of splendor to health, wealth and prosperity, my best life now. Many today, see Jesus as an individualistic Christian spirituality, as a means to psychological fulfillment to reach their full potential. It's the pathway to becoming a better you. And when I see the way that pastors handle the Bible, and what passes these days for preaching, even expository preaching, I no longer wonder why the sheep have been left weak and sick.

Ed Litton, the newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, largest Protestant organization in the world. Was a church planter for seven years. 27-year pastor in his current church and it's come to light he's made a practice of plagiarizing sermons of other pastors, most notably JD Greer, his SBC predecessor in the presidency.

Just out of curiosity, I decided to check out the now famous Romans series to see how Mr. Greer handled the text. There's a video where you can see online a, a montage of Ed Litton making a, a point, just going verbatim makes a point and then it flashes over to JD Greer making the exact same point because he preached it first and back and forth and back and forth. It's, it's just embarrassing. But I just want to see this Roman series and see how Mr. Greer handled Romans.

His series on Romans, 16 chapters was only 31 messages. At 16 chapters that averages to two messages per chapter or if you take 432 verses in Romans, that's roughly 14 verses per sermon. That is giving rather short shrift to the most important doctrinal treatment of the gospel in Scripture. I visited Grace to You's website to see how John MacArthur handled Romans. His expository series, he preached 121 messages, which is roughly 3.5 verses per sermon, meaty.

I visited the Martyn Lloyd Jones Trust website the sermons of Martyn Lloyd Jones more than 350 sermons on Romans, which is about one verse per sermon, more than meaty. Us younger preachers should take a hint from the older preacher, shouldn't

we? As the older, more mature preachers will tell you, just ask John MacArthur, there is no exhausting the depth of the Gospel by going deep and expounding the truths of the gospel.

Doctrines like God's sovereign initiative in salvation, his election from before the foundation of the world, the spirit's regeneration, double imputation, penal substitutionary atonement, justification by faith, sanctification through obedient repentance, endurance in suffering, future glorification, the depth of teaching releases the power of God unto salvation, for all who believe.

Depth of conviction provides assurance when the conscience troubles. Another observation, here in the first couple verses, second, notice that the gospel is something proclaimed, something preached. It's not a TED Talk. It's not a devotional. It's not an inspirational, therapeutic message. It's preaching, notice the language there. Verse 2, it's declare; verse 9, it's proclaimed. Look at verse 12. It says, exhorted, encouraged, charged. Repent and believe the gospel that is not a suggestion.

Gospel preaching is the authoritative proclamation of truth. Why is that, that we need to preach so boldly, with a voice of command and authority and exhortative preaching, why is that? Because in all of us, as you yourselves know, and as I know, in my own heart because of the presence of indwelling sin. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. I need to come back every single week and get my heart pierced by your word. There's hard heartedness.

There's a, just a tendency because of the effects, the noetic effects of sin in the world. There's a tendency to forget, to become dull, to drift, to become slack in diligent obedience. God designed biblical gospel preaching, to be the spirit's regular means of grace, to sanctify every believer, no matter who they are. They're ministered to by the same one guy in that pulpit. Plies that word, that's preached powerfully, exhortatively, he applies it to each and every heart as he sees, the meets the need. He does so to sanctify the believer.

He does so to counsel the confused and the downhearted, to comfort the afflicted, to encourage the faithful. Faithful pastors who know what their job is, they are essential in God's

PILLAR OF
— TRUTH — 

design. They are essential gifts of Christ to the church,
Ephesians 4:11 to 12, "to equip the saints for the work of
ministry."