

Reforming the Evangelical Pastorate, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

1 Thessalonians chapter 2, beautiful imagery of what shepherding looks like. We'll make some observations, see some implications for pastoral ministry. Paul is speaking of what these Christians know to be true. You see that there? You yourselves know, and as you know, that's how he begins the sentence in verse 1, it's in the middle of verse 2, also, middle of verse 5. It's there again in the beginning of verse 11. Add to that verse 9, "You remember brothers," and in verse 10, "You are witnesses," to what are they witnesses? What is it that they know? What have they seen and heard?

The Thessalonians witness the resolve of Paul and his co-workers to preach the gospel of God, no matter what. These Thessalonian believers could see it for themselves. Paul's coming was not in vain, that is to say it was not aimless. It wasn't without any purpose. He came with purpose, he came with aim, he came with an intent, he came with gospel resolve to

preach the word no matter what. Paul and Silas you know, had come directly from Philippi, came from a Philippian jail.

Luke tells us in Acts 16, they were seized while preaching, they're dragged into the crowded marketplace, thrown down before the rulers and the magistrates. There's no trial, no due process, no innocent until proven guilty, a travesty of justice. As a mob rule, as followed by a melee of mob violence, Acts 16:22. The crowd's attacking them. The magistrates tore the garments off of them, gave orders to beat them with rods inflicted many blows upon them and threw them into prison.

What is the result of persecution on a true pastor? What is the effect of a miscarriage of justice for a shepherd? Firmer resolve, deepened conviction, a need to proclaim the truth like Richard Baxter says "I preached as never sure to preach again. And as a dying man to dying men." Some of these so called pastors today can't even handle mask mandates and shutting down your church and all that stuff, they can't handle that.

They're willing to cater and cave to really what is mild government pressure, there's no magistrates tearing their clothes off and beating them in public and casting them into chains. Come on, nobody's shooting at you. These men, Paul, his co-workers, they preach the gospel out of deep conviction. Resolve to preach no matter the circumstances, the Thessalonians can see that for themselves. They could see that. The persecution didn't stop when they left Philippi, it followed them into Thessalonica. They preached anyway, it says "Amidst much conflict," the Thessalonians were there to see it.

You know how heartening that is for you to watch somebody who's going through trouble and they stand firm? God filled these shepherds with resolve and endurance and holy boldness, the believers could see it for themselves, it heartened them. It showed them that there is something to this. It is non-humanly explicable. It's supernatural. These men are standing up amidst this conflict.

Live interaction. Virtual is so obviously a cheap counterfeit, something fake. That is why we may not abide a mandate that says, put your church online and it's church. It's

not church. No pastor permits a disembodied image on a video screen to substitute, intentionally substitute for his regular shepherding presence. That is a dereliction of duty that they will not abide because of their conscience because they fear God.

Pastors are not only bold preachers of God's gospel, but verse 3, pastors are diligent seekers of God's approval. Look at it there, verse 3, "For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive," notice virtual preachers, deceiving the audience into thinking that they're there actually in present, in person. "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 with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor do we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others."

Key thought here, to the pastor, God's approval is all that matters. God's approval is all the matters, since God is the one who entrusted him with the gospel. And since God is the one who called, gifted, commissioned them, gave him a platform. Paul and

his co-workers care only about pleasing him. Only God's approval matters.

Now to many who have been weaned on the man centered theology of a man centered American culture. Paul's singular concern for God's approval may come across to them instinctively as somewhat cold, somewhat unfeeling. In modern psychological terms, he seems to lack empathy. How can a pastor not care how people are feeling whether they're satisfied, whether they're actually satisfied customers?

Looking ahead, we know that Paul is not unfeeling toward people at all. He's not cold, he's not indifferent. This isn't the writing of a man who's indifferent to people. His compassion toward them, loves him dearly, but the reason, reason for that kind of love, a love that animates and motivates his ministry, a reason for his compassion is not the people. It's not their desperate condition. It's not that he's bleeding over the lost state of the world. There is that, but it's primarily fundamentally driven by, he cares only about pleasing God in His ministry.

In other words, his passions are rightly aligned, his passions are rightly attuned, because his loyalty is rightly aligned. When pleasing God is the only thing that matters, God produces great fruit from the pastor who fears him that way.

By way of counterexample, consider those who pander for applause and praise and approval of men, chasing audiences. It was in 2017 that Newsmax published, Newsmax's 100 most influential evangelicals in America. Newsmax is a conservative news site. So there's no overtly antichrist agenda coming out here. It's just, this is how they think, this is how they see it from a conservative point of view. These are people that probably voted along with you. They're, they're writing these articles.

So if we exclude all the non-pastors, that is politicians, para church leaders, cultural leaders, and all that kind of stuff, the top 10 most influential pastors, that is those who regularly are in a pulpit. They're these Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, Creflo Dollar, John Hagee, Charles Stanley, T.D. Jakes,

Paula White, John Piper, Tim Keller, and David Jeremiah. Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar and Paula White, they don't even know or preach the gospel. They're word of faith, health, wealth, prosperity teachers. T.D. Jakes, he denies the Trinity altogether. He's an anti-trinitarian so he's in the heretics camp as well. He's from the United Pentecostal church.

Charles Stanley lost his credibility way back in the circumstances surrounding his divorce and the integrity of keeping his word. His son Andy isn't helping him regain his credibility at all. Tim Keller, he's the co-founder of the Gospel Coalition, he holds to biological evolution, denies Genesis as literal history, denies the literal Adam and Eve. He's been quite outspoken about that. Rick Warren, he embraced Pope Francis as, quote, "Our new pope," Noting quote, "His humility and authenticity." Mr. Warren's ability to assess true humility comes into great question when he ordains three women as elders in his church this last May.

Following week on Mother's Day, Rick's wife Kay preached the Sunday sermon at Saddleback Church. They're on the list. Heretical false teachers, man centered evangelicals, these are

exactly the sorts of people that Paul identifies. Teaching coming from them, it does spring forth from error, verse 3, it comes from impurity, it comes from an attempt to deceive.

They're deceived. And so out of deception comes deception. If their hearts are deceived, everything that comes out of their mouth is deceptive and is deceiving. They come to people with words of flattery, attracting people by flattering them, speaking pleasant words to hide their covetous motives. Hirelings and heretics are man pleasers. Practice of flattery becomes second nature to them, some are so skilled in it, it becomes like an art form. How many different flowery things they can say about themselves or about one another? Affirming one another.

It's exactly what we see in Rick Warren's words, fawning all over Pope Francis, calling this arch heretic, this arch false teacher, "Humble and authentic." Is Rick Warren shepherding his flock that way? Is he helpful to the people that are trying to think about which voice to listen to? All they're doing is engaging and flattering and commending one another. Watch out. Listen, watch out for a pastor who never confronts

you. Watch out for a pastor who never speaks a contrary word to you. Looks you in the eyes, never contradicts you, watch out.

"A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet," Proverbs 29:5. False shepherds, they'll be your biggest cheerleaders. They'll say whatever keeps you happy, because behind that flattery and fake smile, there's an ugly heart of greed that is conniving and scheming. They want to keep you giving, keep you coming, keep the money flowing. They make merchandise of souls for the sake of money, influence, glory, fame, reputation on this earth, whatever it is that satisfies their endlessly bubbling heart of idolatry, churning up more and more fleshly desire for them to chase.

It's so common today, that whenever a true pastor confronts sin or corrects error or holds people accountable for their words and their actions, whenever a true pastor reproves, rebukes, and exhorts, even with patience in teaching, for those who are very used to the coddling and pampering of fake pastors and the coddling and pampering, frankly of this age, they just don't react well. No matter, God fearing pastors carry on.

They care only about God's approval. And so they keep on reproving and rebuking and exhorting all with great patience and instruction, because they want to please God. You're not going to be there, advocating for them in the end, they're going to stand alone before that *bema* seat of Christ, that judgment seat, to give an account of their life and ministry. By pleasing God, guess what? It turns out that that produces truly, deeply, passionately loving pastors as well. These are men who do them real good, because they fear God not man.

Pastors are eager and cheerful as gentle laborers among God's people. So verse 6, "Though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ, nevertheless, we were not gentle, but children among you," end of sentence. So Paul is saying, rather than being overbearing and overwhelming, comes in with an apostolic title, comes in with a commission from Christ. He is a weighty man. None of those young believers could tell when he was in their midst. Paul's gentle, hospitable nature, it mirrored the level of these new babes, what they could handle. He was kind to them, he was, like, like a child talking with other children in the faith.

Continuing in, with the new sentence, middle of verse 7,
"Like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So,
being affectionately desirous of you, ready to share with you
not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you
have 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."

I marvel at young moms. I marvel to watch my wife, as God
was giving us children. See how hard she worked and she'd be
totally exhausted. Men, you've seen your wives, mothers doing
this. Totally exhausted, didn't matter though, her maternal
instincts have kicked in and she is caring for those kids, drove
her on. She, even in the middle of the night, she's feeding
those babies, caring for all their needs. She's cutting sharp
fingernails so they don't scrape their face, cleaning eyes,
nursing rashes, she's, she's nurturing them, bathing them,
changing dirty diapers, and when that day's cycle of work and
labor is over. She'd crash for a few hours of sleep, then get
up, do it all over again.

All during the night, all during the day, barely tending to her own needs. Her own needs seem to matter very little to her. She's dedicated. My wife to me was a living picture of what Paul describes here. And a lesson to me of sacrificial service, hard work with no complaining, with no grumbling. She loved her kids, just as mothers are gentle laborers among their children, whether they're infants or toddlers, whether teenagers or young adults. So pastors are gentle laborers among their flock.

Just as mothers share everything with their children holding nothing back. Time, attention, resources, money, affection, tears, pain, sorrow, struggle, so pastors do the same with their flock. Just as mothers are driven by an affectionate desire because those children are and have become and even more so as the days go by, becomes so very dear. So pastors are driven by an affection for the flock, a deep affection because of their love for the God of the flock. They love the flock.

Paul said something similar in 2 Corinthians 12:14 to 15, even dealing with a very difficult church. The thorn in his side

was these false teachers that come in and just tearing apart this flock and turning them against him. Dealt with their stubbornness over and over, but he would bear with him.

And he says in 2 Corinthians 12, he says, "I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours." I'm not after your stuff, not after your money, not after your approval, not after your liking me on whatever social media platform, "I will not be a burden for I seek not what is yours, but you." I seek you. I'm after your soul. I'm after your heart. I want you entirely. "For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children, and I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." That is the idea.

Pastors are gentle laborers among God's people, tending to his sheep. Where does that shepherding imagery come from? Isaiah says back in Isaiah 40, "He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young, those that are nursing." Folks as the world becomes colder, harder, as the world becomes more hostile, more cruel, as it tears itself apart, as it prefers groups and group identity over individual

care, it'll become indifferent to people. Harsh, unfeeling, get it done leadership models of the mega, multi-site, online church pastors, oh, those will make sense to the worldly minded.

To the flock of God, to those who are torn asunder by the world. They're gonna run, not walk, they're gonna run to come under the ministry of gentle hearted shepherds with the heart of Christ. Pastors like that are true pastors. They set a standard for shepherding love that establishes the culture of an entire church. An entire church guided by a shepherding heart, that church is a shepherding church, they take on the heart of the pastor. That is the church Ephesians 4:16, is inclined to build itself up in love, because they've been rightly trained, rightly influenced to think like shepherds.

They have shepherding concern for one another, even if they're not appointed as shepherds over the flock, they're shepherding among the flock, as sheep care for sheep. You can call that discipleship in the church, that's what it is. So pastors are preachers of God's gospel. They're seekers of God's approval. They're laborers among God's people.

And finally, pastors are righteous ministers for God's glory. Pastors are righteous ministers for God's glory. Now Paul looks at the example set by fathers. Again in verse 10, appealing to what they know appealing to what they've seen, what they can see for themselves. He says in verse 10, "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 and glory." Two key thoughts here, character and concern, character and concern. First, Paul's character, his character is apparent in his conduct toward the church. He's not a flatterer, he's not impure. He's not coming with impure motives. He's not coming with an intent to deceive. Instead, he is holy and righteous and blameless. He has pious concern.

He has concern for the standard set by God's holy character, his righteous character, righteousness determines his

every step. And he's blameless. There's nothing in his life that people can see. And he's even concerned about what God can see. He's a blameless man. Paul's character had been tested, over and over and over again, in ways that you and I are never going to go through. Many of us are not going to go through the kind of testing of his character and the proof of trying his character, that he went through.

Beatings, suffering persecution, man that'll draw out the sin in somebody. And Paul, came through it over and over again, all the trials, afflictions, persecutions he faced, many of which the Thessalonians themselves had personally witnessed right before them. His character was tested and he passed the tests, with God as his witness because God is his help. Paul proved to them over and over again. What he claimed back in verse 4 that he had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

Paul is no fraud. He is no hireling, he is the genuine article and all true legitimate Christian ministry, you need to understand, all ministry is a function of trust. If people don't trust you, your ministry has no credibility. If your ministry

has no credibility, your gospel won't be heard, your admissions won't be heeded because everybody knows intuitively character matters. That's why Bill Hybels is no longer at Willow Creek. Character matters. When things are being done behind the scenes, while he's got a public face and it comes out, character matters.

That's why Carl Lentz is no longer, whatever he was over that abomination called Hillsong, New York. His character matters and everybody can tell, even the ungodly can tell, that's bad. And now his Chief Leader Brian Houston is being brought up on charges in Australia. For all that's been going on in the Hillsong environment, why have we been singing Hillsong in churches, evangelical churches, why are they singing that stuff? Character matters.

Brings us to the second key thought here. Not only character, but concern. There is a great, deep concern here. Proven character helps people to listen to genuine, godly concern. Paul exhorts, he encourages, he charges, each and every member individually and collectively to walk in a manner worthy of God. What's that about? What's walking in a manner worthy of

God? It is to acknowledge and understand that God has graciously given them citizenship in his kingdom.

Is that not of eternal significance? Can anything compare to having citizenship in the kingdom of God, that is everlasting? He's allowed them to share in his glory. It is right, that they act accordingly. And that's what a father is concerned to do for a child under his care, son, my daughter, that is not appropriate for you to not acknowledge that. To not acknowledge what has been graciously given to you. Uh, you got to get your behavior, right. Because now as a citizen of that kingdom, you represent that kingdom.

I don't care what your immediate hurts and wounds and pains and complaints and grumblings are, you need to set that aside. Something else matters more than you, it's that kingdom, it's that King, you represent, it's that badge you wear now, that matters. Such a high honor, isn't it? Such a holy privilege. These children in the faith need to be taught what it means to be accepted by God. They need to be taught what it means to show respect to God, to appreciate and honor the gift of grace that they've been given.

Walk worthy of this high and holy calling. That's a father's concern. A mother will patch up the booboos and kiss the elbows and all that other stuff. That's good. It's short term compassion. Those kids need it. You know what a father does? "Rub some dirt on that get back in the game, team needs you. Doesn't matter how much you're hurting, wipe off those tears. Get out there." it's not uncompassionate, this is long term compassion. It's a compassion he has for a greater reality. Short term compassion of mothers, that's it's so important, so vital.

Long term compassion by fathers, looking at the end, looking at life ahead and realizing you're gonna get cut, and scraped, and wounded, and banged up, and bruised, and you need to fight anyway, because the Taliban is not putting down the guns. Get in the game. So like a father, Paul sees the big picture, that these young Thessalonian believers, they couldn't see from their less mature vantage point. It's the way it is, they needed his fatherly perspective, his instruction, his wisdom, his perspective to keep pointing them in a righteous way

from his larger vantage point, to see ahead, to see what they're going to face. Point them in the righteous way.

And he has to do that through exhortation, and through encouragement, and through urging. What he says here, is what he said to the Colossians, Colossians 1:28 that "We proclaim Christ. We admonish every man," admonishing, that's encouragement with a bite. It's strong, "Admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom. That we may present every man complete in Christ." Everyone, the way to do that, Paul puts it this way to pastor Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:1-2, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living in the dead and by his appearing in his kingdom, preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience in teaching."

That is not the kind of ministry that most mega, multi-site, online church pastors can pull off. It's not something they're interested in pulling off. But it's something that those who fear God, those who are animated by his shepherding heart, and by the help of his Holy Spirit, preaching his Word, few

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pastors can be found faithful, and their sheep will be better
for it.