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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, May 2, 2021

Matthew 28:19-20, etc. “Support Your Pastor’s Mission”

Intro. This morning I am preaching the second message of the series entitled, “How to Relate Well to Your New Pastor.” This series is not only based on Scripture but also based on over 40 years of experience as a pastor. Today’s message is entitled, “Support Your Pastor’s Mission.” A congregation needs to understand what their pastor’s God-called mission really is. You need to guard against expecting your pastor to do tasks that are outside his mission. Then you need to support your pastor’s biblical mission with your words of encouragement, your participation, and your prayers.

So this morning I want to share with you the mission of a pastor in order of priority. I was inclined to list evangelism as the top priority of a pastor, but in Ephesians 4:11 Paul speaks of the evangelist, who would clearly have the primary responsibility of evangelism. Most missionaries should recognize evangelism as their highest priority. However, a pastor’s main responsibility is to his congregation. I do not have time in this message to list *every* possible duty of the pastor, but I will list the most important ones.

Now based on the Great Commission that I just read to you, I would say that a major priority of a pastor is to:

I. MAKE DISCIPLES

Jesus gave His Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. To “make disciples” is the main command given. Yet how should a pastor make disciples of those who have become believers in Jesus?

A. Through Biblical Teaching – By definition a disciple is a learner and discipleship cannot take place apart from teaching God’s Word. Teaching specifically is included in the Great Commission that I just read to you. In Acts 6:4 the disciples listed “the ministry of the word” as one of two of their greatest priorities. In Eph. 4:11 a pastor is called a “pastor-teacher.”¹ The apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the Word!” He also said to him in 1 Timothy 4:6, “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” Except for Christian character, the primary qualification of a pastor is being “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2b).² There is no doubt in my mind but that one of the main ways a pastor disciplines his congregation is through teaching the Word of God.

Since teaching God’s word is such a priority for a pastor, each pastor should give heed to Paul’s exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” I also believe that a pastor

¹ Based on a rule of Greek grammar.

² Likewise, when Paul gives the qualifications of a pastor, he says in Titus 1:9 that he should be “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” In Acts 11:26 we read that Paul and Barnabas assembled with the church for a whole year “and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

should follow the example of the apostle Paul, who spoke to the pastors of Ephesus saying, “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Pastors should give their congregation a well-rounded diet of God’s Word. I believe the best way to do that is to preach mostly expository sermons through books of the entire Bible.

On the other hand, the congregation’s responsibility is to ensure that he has time to study and prepare for teaching and preaching. Providing financial support so he can serve full-time is one way. In Acts 6 we see another way that is to be done, and that is by seeing to it that deacons and others handle responsibilities that *they* can do instead of the pastor, such as benevolent ministry.

Another way a pastor disciplines his congregation is:

B. By Setting an Example – In 1 Peter 5:3 Peter exhorted pastors to “be examples to the flock.” The apostle Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” People may be impacted more by what they see than what they hear. So setting an example is so important.

This is why Paul exhorted Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine....” Likewise, he said to pastors in Acts 20:28, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock....” A pastor must always take heed to the well-being of his own spiritual walk with the Lord. Otherwise, he will not be able to maintain an exemplary life. He must spend time with God in personal devotions daily.

Another way a pastor is to make disciples is:

C. By Training for Service - In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul said that Christ has given pastors to his church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry....” God never intended for pastors to do all the ministry in a church. Instead, we see here that a pastor is to train and equip the saints to do Christian ministry.

One aspect of training for discipleship is mentoring. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Notice that Timothy was to select certain “faithful men” and invest time in these men to disciple them and mentor them by teaching and example, that they in turn will be able to disciple others.

Though I have done this to some degree in mentoring deacons and doing witness training, I believe I should have done more mentoring during my ministry. See to it that your new pastor takes time to do this.

So a pastor is to use various means to disciple his congregation. Another major responsibility of a pastor is to:

II. LEAD THE CHURCH IN DOING EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

Evangelism and missions are certainly implied in the Great Commission. The command to baptize implies prior evangelism. The command to *go* and make disciples of all *nations* makes missions a primary aspect of the Great Commission. Jesus told His apostles in Acts 1:8 that with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, “you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:5, “... do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

One way a pastor is to do evangelism is by preaching the gospel. Though the vast majority of those in my congregation profess to be Christians, I believe that I must include preaching the gospel and calling for a commitment of repentance and faith. As my preaching ministry has expanded into local television and the Internet, it is even more important that I as a pastor include gospel preaching in my Sunday messages. Since I mainly preach through books of the Bible, how much I do gospel preaching depends on the Bible book I am preaching.

One time I visited a member of the church who was expecting to die soon. He acknowledged that he had criticized me in his heart for preaching the gospel is often as I did. He apologized to me and affirmed my responsibility to preach the gospel. Even so, your new pastor should have the freedom to preach whatever God is laid on his heart, and he should indeed be a *gospel* preacher.

Of course, a pastor should also engage in personal witnessing. I have done that over the years, but I wish I had done more.

A pastor's responsibility is also to lead the church in missions, which is taking the gospel and the love of Christ to other communities or even other nations. One way you can support your pastor to fulfill this aspect of his mission is to give him time and financial support to go on mission trips from time to time. One of the great experiences of my ministry was last year's South Africa mission trip, during which we witnessed about 20 coming to know the Lord as their Savior!

Finally, the mission of your pastor is to:

III. SHEPHERD THE FLOCK

This aspect of a pastor's mission is found numerous times. In John 21 Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. When Peter answered, "yes," Jesus reminded him of his responsibility to shepherd (*poimaino*) His flock in v.16, a term that includes all aspects of a shepherd's work. Likewise, it should come as no surprise that Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers...." Then the apostle Paul exhorted the pastors of the church of Ephesus in Acts 20:28, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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."³

So what is involved in a pastor's responsibility as shepherd?

A. Feed the Flock - I have already covered this, but I will point out that the *first* command that Jesus gave to Peter in reference to his "lambs," was to feed (*bosko*) them (Jn. 21:15). He repeated that command in v.17. So how does a pastor feed his flock? He is talking about giving them spiritual food, the Word of God (Mt. 4:4), by means of preaching and teaching.

Since I have already dealt with this topic, I will say no more and move on to the next responsibility:

B. Lead and Oversee the Flock - The second most common title for a pastor in the New Testament is "overseer." Acts 20:28 says, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,

³ Yet the noun form, translated "pastor," is only found in Eph. 4:11

among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God....” The noun or verb form of the word is found 5 times in reference to pastors.⁴

So a pastor is to oversee and manage the work of the church. The administration of the church can take up more time than most pastors want to give. Having good staff and faithful lay leaders over the various programs and ministries of the church can be a great help. Be the kind of staff or lay leader that sees to it that your ministry is functioning well and needs little oversight by the pastor.

C. Love and Care for the Flock – This is implied in the titles of a pastor, that of overseer and shepherd. In 1 Timothy 3:5 Paul speaks of the responsibility of pastors to “take care of the church of God.” In contrast, Jesus said of a hireling in John 10:13, that he “does not care about the sheep.”

Timothy was a great example in this regard. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 2:20, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care⁵ for your state.”

Beyond what I have already mentioned, there are two ways that a pastor is to care for his congregation:

1. By Visitation – This ministry practice is not as common today, especially during the pandemic. Yet in Mt. 25:36 Jesus commended certain servants at the judgment seat of Christ saying, “... I was sick and you visited⁶ Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.” James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble....” However, that verse was not given to pastors only. 1 Cor. 12:25 says “that the members should have the same care for one another.”

I do want to say one word to the congregation about this aspect of a pastor’s ministry. You should not expect this to become the main priority for a pastor. During times of sickness and bereavement the family will rally and spend much time with that family member. Yet that only happens once in a while. Imagine being a pastor where that happens almost every week in the entire congregation. A pastor cannot survive in ministry if he carries that load to the same extent that family members do. Deacons and others in the church must help the pastor with this caregiving responsibility, or he will either burnout or neglect his preaching and teaching ministry, which biblically is his primary responsibility.

Another way a pastor cares for his congregation is:

2. By Prayer - One way a pastor cares for the well-being of his flock is by praying for them. In Acts 6:4 the apostles said that prayer was one of two priorities that they had. Then James 5:14-15a says, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick....”

So encourage your pastor to make personal, in-person and small group prayer ministry an important aspect of his care for the congregation.

Another responsibility of a pastor is to:

⁴ Php. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2. The term “elders” is the most common term used of pastors (Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1).

⁵ Though this verb in Greek normally refers to worry, it can have a positive meaning of concern as seen here, and in 1 Cor. 12:25, “that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”

⁶ *Episkeptomai*, related to the Greek word for overseer or Bishop. The same word is found in James 1:27.

D. Protect the Flock - In Acts 20:29-31a the apostle Paul said to the pastors of Ephesus, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch....” Likewise, he said in 2 Timothy 4:3-4a, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth....” A pastor is to protect his congregation from false teachers and false doctrine.

This means that the pastors should give oversight over who is teaching the congregation. That task is easy when it comes to governing who speaks to the entire congregation, but more difficult regarding who is speaking to small groups and individuals within the church. TV and the Internet is giving false teachers easy access to believers and the pastors are probably not even aware of it. How can a pastor protect against the wolf they do not even see? So I believe every small group in our church should be accountable to the pastors for the external resources they use. As for individuals, I would say that your biblical teaching should primarily come from your own pastor for the sake of doctrinal and practical unity.⁷ In fact, the influence of outsiders has done more to cause disunity in local congregations than just about anything I know. Then, before you listen to an outside teacher on a regular basis, you could check with one of the pastors make sure they are solid biblically. If they are expository in approach, that is a good sign. You don’t need to ask me about the likes of David Jeremiah, John MacArthur, Adrian Rogers, Tony Evans and Paul Washer, just to name a few among many faithful, biblical preachers.

Finally, I close with this:

IV. DO YOUR PART

As your pastor is seeking to fulfill his biblical mission, I will do it courage you to do the following:

A. Participate - You are not to watch him and just cheer him on. The church’s responsibility is to gather to hear the pastors preach and teach. Acts 2:42 says of the early church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine....” Heb. 10:25 says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together....” Participate in your pastor’s preaching ministry. That will encourage him and you will benefit from it. Participate in prayer meetings. Participate in ministry opportunities with your pastor.

B. Pray for Your Pastor - One of the greatest gifts you can give to your pastor is the gift of consistent, constant, and heartfelt prayers. Several times the apostles asked for prayer from their Christian followers. In 1 Thess. 5:25 Paul said, “Brethren, pray for us.” In Romans 15:30 Paul wrote, “Now I beg you, brethren, ... that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.” Likewise, Paul wrote in 2 Thess. 3:1, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.” Paul specifically asked for prayer that God would remove any hindrances to the spread of the Gospel.

⁷ Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:10, 12-13, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you.... Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided?...”

Even so, you should pray for your pastor and his ministry on a regular basis. You also need to pray for your pastor because Satan will attack ministers of the gospel, especially the ones that are faithfully preaching God's Word. Pray for God's protection from temptation. Pray for God's protection from trials that bring lasting harm. Begin praying now for your next pastor.

I appreciate so much prayers on my behalf. Your prayers have sustained me these 34 years. There are times when I am preaching that I especially sense the power of the Holy Spirit enabling me to preach. The words just flow from my mouth with heart-felt conviction. Prayer from the congregation is so important for any pastor.

Conclusion: So I hope you will understand what your pastor's mission is, and pledge to support him in every way. As I said last week, the well-being of a church is largely tied to the well-being of their pastor, and how well he fulfills his biblical mission as a pastor.

Sources: This message was mainly compiled from the major Scripture passages addressing the roles of apostles and pastors, based on Pastor Felker's database of over 1600 sermons. Also used Pastor Felker's doctrine course and Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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