

Spiritual Gifts, Part 4

Pastor-Teacher

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The fourth office that Paul lists is the gift of pastor-teacher. Before we examine this office we need to justify the combining of the two terms (pastor, teacher) into one category. John Calvin (whose interpretation was adopted by the early Reformed and Presbyterian churches) argued that the apostle was designating two distinct offices. The pastor preached, counseled, administered the sacraments, etc., while the teacher or doctor did not. He writes, "...there is a *distinct* class of teachers, who preside both in the education of pastors and in the instruction of the whole church. It may sometimes happen, that the same person is both a pastor and a teacher, but the duties to be performed are entirely different."¹ In *The Institutes* he adds, "Next come pastors and teachers, whom the church can never go without. There is, I believe, this difference between them: teachers are not put in charge of discipline, or administering the sacraments, or warnings and exhortations, but only of Scriptural interpretation—to keep doctrine whole and pure among believers. But the pastoral office includes all these functions within itself."²

Calvin's view (which is found in the Westminster Directory) should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) In the sentence that lists the various offices in the church, each particular office is preceded by the word "some" (*tous de*). Yet the recurring "some" (*tous de*) is omitted before the word teacher (*didaskalous*). Pastor and teacher are connected by the simple conjunction "and" (*kai*). "The absence of the article before *didaskalous* [teacher] proves that the apostle intended to designate the same persons as at once pastors and teachers. The former term designates them as *episkopoi*, 'overseers,' the latter as instructors."³ "Were they two separate offices we would expect to read, 'He gave some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, pastors; some, teachers;' but the apostle writes, 'some, pastors and teachers,' linking the two together; and generally speaking, these two offices are found in the same man."⁴ (2) There are no historical examples in the New Testament of a separate office of teacher or doctor as described by Calvin. While we owe a great debt to Calvin as the greatest theologian and expositor in the sixteenth century, it is likely that he was reading a modern function back into the New Testament. The university professor was a development of the middle ages. The seminary professor came into being even later after the Protestant Reformation. (3) The New Testament describes pastors as men who are able to teach. In their role as shepherd or pastor (*poimeno*) they

¹ John Calvin, *Commandments on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 280.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles, translator (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 2:1057; (IV: III: 4).

³ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 161.

⁴ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16*, 161.

are elders ([*presbuteroi*] Ac. 14:23; 15:2-4; 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1) and overseers ([*episkopoi*] Ac. 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7) who have the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9; Rom. 12:7-8). d.) It is simply impossible to separate biblical teaching from exhortation. “The thing is well nigh impossible. The one function includes the other. The man who teaches duty and the grounds of it, does at the same time admonish and exhort.”⁵ While it is certainly true that some pastors are much better at teaching than others and some may be better at personal counseling and human interaction than others, all should continually work at improving in both areas.

Although the terms pastor and teacher are to be taken together as one office, the fact that Paul uses two words is significant. The minister of the word is a shepherd of God’s flock. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as oversees” (1 Pet. 5:2; cf. Ac. 20:28). The term shepherd refers to a number of activities: instruction, discipline, protection. Pastoral work involves a comprehensive oversight. The complete care of the congregation will involve personal counseling, disciplinary action (when needed), fervent prayer, protection from false teachers, dispensing the sacraments, etc... “It implies careful, tender, vigilant superintendence and government, being the function of an overseer or elder.”⁶ “It is his task, in following the Chief and Great Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4; Hebrews 13:20), to shepherd God’s flock so that they do not lack. That is to say, he must meet their every need.”⁷

The term “teacher” indicates that teaching is the main characteristic of the pastoral office. Shepherding is carried out primarily through teaching the word of God. This emphasis on teaching makes perfect sense when one considers that Christians are dependent on the Bible for everything related to salvation, faith and life. Sanctification can only come through a knowledge of divine revelation (Jn. 17:17). Even the sacraments are useless apart from a biblical understanding of their purpose and meaning. Whether a pastor is preaching or giving private counseling, all his exhortations are based on an exegesis of Scripture. Thus all bishops or overseers must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). They must disciple the nations by teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded (Mt. 28:20).

There are a number of matters related to the pastoral office that need to be discussed. First, unlike the other offices previously considered (apostle, prophet, evangelist) which are extraordinary and temporary, the office of pastor-teacher is ordinary and perpetual. This point is established by the following biblical observations. First, the office of pastors was not accompanied by supernatural sign-gifts of prophetic inspiration. Thus, teachers are not described by Paul as laying the once for all foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-22). Their job is to faithfully transmit the doctrine of the Old Testament Scriptures along with the apostolic and new covenant prophetic revelation to others. Note Paul’s command to Titus regarding overseers:

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, 161-162.

⁶ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1882]), 305.

⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Preacher’s Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling and Leadership* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 7.

“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” (Tit. 1:9).

Second, the apostles understood the temporary nature of their own office (1 Cor. 15:8; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 1:1-2) thus made provision for pastor-teachers to continue the ministry of the word in various churches after their departure. Note Paul’s injunction to Timothy. “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” (2 Tim. 2:2). Likewise he says to Titus: “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Tit. 1:5). Interestingly, Titus and 2 Timothy were the last epistles written by Paul. This explains the apostle’s great concern with the placement of qualified pastor-teachers in all the churches.

Third, the fact that all the new covenant worship ordinances are perpetual, requires a perpetual office of minister of the word to carry out their administration in public worship. Bannerman writes, “Inasmuch as these ordinances cannot administer themselves, the proof in favor of them also carries with it an evidence in favor of a standing order of men set apart, and necessary for their administration. If church worship is itself a divine and permanent order, it inevitably implies worshipers on the one hand, and the administration of worship on the other,—the office of those who are ministered unto in religious service, and the office of those who minister.”⁸

Until our Lord returns the sacraments, the preaching of the word, church discipline (which involves personal counseling and sanction when necessary), the public reading of Scripture and so on must continue. If these ordinances and church discipline require the pastoral office then obviously the office of pastor-teacher continues.

Fourth, Christ’s commission to disciple the nations through teaching the whole counsel of God and administering the sacraments (Mt. 28:19-20) presupposes a continuing teaching office in the church with the authority to administer the sacraments. This point is proved by the fact that Jesus connects the Great Commission to the promise of His presence until *the end of the world*. The Great Commission ends with —“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). “In the commission thus given to the first teachers of the Word, linked as it is to the promise of His spiritual presence with them through all ages, we have in fact the *twofold* agency to be employed by Christ for the conversion of men, and evidence that both forms of that agency were equally and alike to be permanent on the earth. *First*, there is the agency of a human ministry for preaching the Word and dispensing the Sacraments; and *second*, there is the agency of the Spirit to be present with them and make them effectual.”⁹

The New Testament office of pastor-teacher has its roots in the Old Testament levitical office. This point is important to keep in mind because among many Presbyterians today the biblical distinction between pastor-teacher and ruling elder has been blurred and even

⁸ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1960 [1869]), 1:424-425.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:425.

theoretically lost in some denominations.¹⁰ In the Old Covenant administration there were elders who ruled in a civil and religious manner among the people (Ex. 4:29; 18:12; 24:1; Num. 11:16, 17, 25; Dt. 19:12; 22: 13:ff.; 25:1; Josh. 20:4, 6; etc.) and there were priests and Levites who ruled but also had special responsibilities separate from the eldership. They were the teachers of Israel and were responsible for the special ordinances of worship. Note how Moses describes their ministry. “They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, and a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar” (Dt. 33:10). The priests and Levites had “special responsibilities for difficult cases which required their expertise in the Scriptures (Deut. 17:18-13; 21:5; 1 Chron. 23:4), but this was adjunct to their primary calling as ministers of the Word in both its forms—Scripture and sacrament—and as superintendents of Israel’s worship (Lev. 1:5ff.; Ezek. 7:26; Ezra 7:10-11; Neh. 8:7-9; 15:11ff.; 16:4ff.; 1 Chron. 15:11ff.; 16:4ff.; 23:4-5; 13, 28-32; 24:19; 2 Chron. 15:3; 17:8-9; Mal. 2:4-9). Drawn from the tribe of Levi, a tribe set apart to the Lord (Num. 3:5-13), and thus a separate and distinct membership, the levitical office did not share the characteristically representative character of the eldership and was organized according to a set of regulations which pertained to itself alone. It does not go beyond the Old Testament evidence to say that the elders were of the people in a way that was not for priests and Levites, who were claimed by God as his own ministers in Israel and who were granted a direct ministerial authority not assigned to elders (e.g., Num. 6:22-27; Deut. 18:2, 5).”¹¹

Since the foundational offices have ceased, the pastor as the minister of the word has a job that is central to the well-being and direction of the church. If the pastor goes astray in the pulpit and does not maintain apostolic doctrine (e.g., biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, six day creationism, the vicarious atonement, the five points of Calvinism, the sovereignty of God, etc.) the local church will eventually follow. The teaching shepherd leads the sheep (Ps. 23:5) either for good or ill. Anyone familiar with church history knows the relative ease with which heretics (e.g., Gnostics, Arians, Romanists, Arminians, Modernists) have deceived professing Christians.

As a protector of the sheep the pastor must vigilantly defend Christian orthodoxy—“the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. 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. 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, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:27-31). There is a good reason why Reformed denominations emphasize the extensive training of ministerial candidates. These men must be able to faithfully teach and apply God’s Word to life; and, must be able to defend

¹⁰ I say theoretically lost because while some Presbyterian denominations have adopted a two office view (elders, deacons), in practice they retain a three office view (e.g., ruling elders are not permitted to administrate the sacraments or give the benediction, etc.).

¹¹ Robert S. Rayburn, “Ministers, Elders and Deacons,” in Mark R. Brown, *Order in the Offices* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993), 225-226.

the faith against every kind of perverted doctrine and heresy. Pastors must “convict those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9); “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:13, 16). Again the apostle wrote Timothy exhorting him: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 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” (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Paul told Titus to strongly rebuke false teachers, “that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13). Titus is to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1); to show doctrinal integrity and sound speech (Tit. 2:7, 8).

A pastor-teacher must be able and willing to confront the enemies of the church, the isms of the world, and schism from within by a prayerful preaching of the whole counsel of God and a personal loving confrontation of straying sheep. All of this takes courage and a willingness to fight for the faith. In our day of false ecumenicalism when most professing churches cannot even define biblical love, the scriptural concept of a pastor as shepherd who uses God’s Word as a rod to protect the sheep has sadly fallen out of favor. In fact pastors who diligently uphold sound doctrine are themselves often accused of being unloving and harsh. In truth, it is the pastors who carelessly expose the sheep to the wolves of this world in the name of love and cooperation that are wicked, foolish and cruel. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Prov. 12:10).

All preaching or teaching that a pastor does as a minister of the Word must be based on a careful explanation of a text (or texts) of Scripture. The pastor’s own personal opinion, the speculations of psychologists or sociologists, the “politically correct” views of civil magistrates, Hollywood movie stars, the news media and theological modernists have no place in the pulpit. The preacher is to take what Christ has spoken in His Word and faithfully convey the meaning of that Word to the people. The Bible describes preaching as reasoning from the Scriptures (cf. Ac. 17:2-3; 18:4, 19; 24:25) and explaining or expounding God’s Word (cf. Mk. 4:34; Lk. 24:27; Ac. 2:14-40; 17:3; 18:36; 28:23). The common practice today of using a text as a springboard to tell “cute” little stories unrelated to the passage, or to tell jokes, or give a lesson on pop-psychology is clearly unscriptural.

When a preacher faithfully exposit God’s Word, his teaching must be regarded and obeyed as if it were the very words of Christ. The person who rejects the faithfully preached word rejects the Lord Himself (cf. Lk. 10:16). This does not mean that ministers have the authority to make up doctrine, rites or ceremonies. They do not have intrinsic authority, for their authority comes from Christ. They cannot bind consciences with their own opinions because the authority resides in God’s Word. Pastors have authority because they are Christ’s ambassadors, representatives and laborers. Steven F. Miller writes, “What the Reformers believed was that a minister is quintessentially a herald. His voice is not his own, but the sounding of another’s. Heralds existed in the days of kings. The king sends his word by the herald. The herald must speak with an authority and royal bearing not essentially his own, for he is presenting the king’s

words by the king's authority. As the Reformers read Scripture, they say this: Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of his church; what he has spoken he has sent to the church by his heralds. The sound is the herald's, but the voice is his. The heralds go with the written Word of God in hand, ready to speak it. This explains the authority with which the Reformers understood a minister to be invested when he proclaims God's Word."¹²

If the average congregant really understood the authority of biblical preaching he or she would take preaching much more seriously. A sermon is not like a seminar or a classroom lecture, for behind it lays the authority and voice of the resurrected King. Tragically the trend today among evangelical churches is to downplay the importance of the sermon in favor of an entertaining "worship" service and various programs. This shift of emphasis is a departure from the Protestant Reformation toward the sensate ritualism of the middle ages.

Preaching or pastoral teaching is intimately connected to exhortation. Biblical teaching is not the conveying of information. It also involves exhortation or direct application to the hearers. Teaching concentrates on exactly what the Bible says (doctrine), while exhortation summons believers to act or live based on that teaching. The former is addressed primarily to the intellect while the latter focuses on the conscience. The New Testament epistles themselves almost always follow this pattern. There is often a discussion of doctrine followed by a therefore or a series of therefores; that is, the concrete implications of the Word for everyday life. "While the immediate purpose of teaching was to instruct, to impart information, to explain, the immediate purpose of exhortation was to help Christians to live out their obedience to the gospel. It was the pastoral application of the gospel to a particular congregation, both to the congregations as a whole and also to the members of it severally. So the eyes of the exhorter had to be firmly fixed not only on the gospel but also on the concrete situation of his hearers."¹³ But the Puritans would refer to such teaching as experimental. They rightly believed that gospel doctrine must permeate every aspect of life: business, politics, agriculture, the arts, science, the family, etc.

The role of the pastor-teacher helps us to understand why the local church is so crucial to sanctification and godly dominion. Exhortation or applicatory preaching presupposes the oversight of elders over a local congregation—a group of believers united together by a covenant of church membership. It is only in such a setting (not a television ministry or "mega-church") that the sins and particular faults of believers can be identified and dealt with biblically through applicatory preaching and personal counseling. No matter how far technology progresses, the direct oversight of a pastor and elders can never be rendered obsolete this side of the second coming of Christ.

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¹² Steven F. Miller, "The New Testament Warrant for the Ministers of the Word" in ed., Mark Brown, *Order in the Officers*, 12.

¹³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistles to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 2:623-624.

