

3

Protestant Pastoral System: HAZARDS

This is a chapter I would much rather not have to write at all. I truly love the men who strive to live for God in the profession of “the Pastor”. Men who feel called of God to “the Pastorate”. I don’t doubt there are many serving in that capacity who have the touch of God in their lives. In fact, I believe there have even been some great men of God who have served Him in that capacity. What I do sense, is that their ministry never became as wonderful as it should have been, due to the flaw of the system.

Having said this, I need to proceed to the ugly side of the dangers inherent in this modern “Pastoral” system.

“Chief Pastor” Hazards

Whether a church has a “Pastor/Congregation” system or a “Pastor/Elders/Congregation” system matters little. Both have a faulty foundation.

A brief biblical overview of the local church has Christ as the

top (and only head), ordering the functioning of the body. On earth, the following position is to be a group of elders, of equal position as examples and not “Lords”. Any “Chief Pastor” would be a “Lord” of a type by that very position. In subjection to the elders are the deacons, who organize the care of the material necessities of the church. The deacons work together with the other members of the body to see the different areas of physical need are met. (Acts 6: 1-6; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 6:1-7; 12:4-6,12-31; Galatians 6: 1,2; Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 2:1-8; 1 Peter 4:8-11;5:1-5)

Taking a quick look at some of the hazards of having a “Chief Pastor System” we find:

1. Discipleship is traded for something akin to institutionalized learning.

This problem doesn’t have to be bound to the “Chief Pastor System”, but it naturally goes along with it. The service that seems to go with this system creates this problem. There may be the additional of something like Sunday School, but that too tends to follow the pattern and limitedness of institutionalized learning.

This holds a serious lesson for the church. We see new Christians, eager to grow in the Lord. They’re encouraged to join a church. They go and sit in the traditional “Pastor/Congregation” service from where they’re fed without effort on their part. They no longer strive in growing and learning. They have all their spiritual food fed to them. They don’t dig in comparing scripture with scripture, with all freely given.

When we take a look at the Gospels, we see disciples who actively worked while they were being discipled (Luke 10:1-11). To them, discipleship was life itself. Like apprenticeship used to be in a previous era. We even see people such as the apostle Paul, immediately upon his conversion (Acts 9:17-21), actively start to preach!

There’s more to be said on discipleship, which will have to be covered in the chapter specifically for that purpose.

2. The training system isn't suited to raise each person in the "Congregation" to the level of the "Pastor".

With an active discipleship method, the more mature raise to the eldership status in a relatively short time. (Evidence for this is covered in the "Elders" chapter.)

Jesus made a powerful statement that applies here:

24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. . . . *Matthew 10:24-25*

The goal of proper discipleship should meet with success in turning out a continual number of active members who are able to disciple others as well:

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. *2 Timothy 2:2*

In so many of our "clergy/laity" churches, we find people sitting in the pews who may have been doing so for more than twenty years, yet they're STILL incapable of filling in for the minister. Such discipleship fairly screams, "FAILURE!"

Now, I do want to point out that this method does actually work to train a few. The system does reach the small number of people who learn well in such a teaching platform. There are some successes. The problem lies in the majority of failures. What's more, for the successes, the system is still insufficient. For those who go on to be able to replace "the minister", have to finish their "discipleship" by leaving that institution and heading off to some Bible school to become adequate. Even the successes act as evidence of the failing system!

3. It provides for a spoon-fed laziness that develops.

When I say spoon-fed, I'm referring to the effect of the system of teaching. When Christians are taught to follow the leading of the Spirit, they have to learn to actively sense Him.

Man's natural tendency is to learn via the garden of Eden temptation. To partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We like lists we can mentally learn. They don't require life and

they require relatively little work.

Men need to be taught to discern the leading of God's Spirit. When he begins to learn this, he becomes an active disciple with Christ. He doesn't just memorize the lesson, he seeks to receive the life and revelation from God.

17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
Ephesians 1:17

This is a wonderful verse. It shouts to our only valuable method of learning the things of God. "Revelation" doesn't mean we get some "new" extra biblical teaching. This verse is referring to information they already had in the head, but tells of the great need of the teaching being on the level of God "revealing" it as truth and life in our spirit. Apart from this, the knowledge is a mental accomplishment that can dangerously be substituted for life. We walk in darkness with the intellectual knowledge of some truth, but without the life flowing of the Spirit.

Take a consideration for a minute at a dangerous natural tendency of man to draw everything up for others. Our churches come up with "creeds" and the like. They may be full of true facts, but have you considered that God had ample opportunity for such to be included in His Bible, yet didn't? Now if we had written the Bible, we most certainly would have had a lot more lists of rules and "doctrinal statements" such as "baptism is by immersion in water after a person has been able to confess his personal faith in Christ". God thought better, though.

Don't misunderstand, truths must be taught, but discipleship calls for a way in teaching those truths that doesn't develop the welfare mentality. The spoon-fed actually become weaker.

There's a creature in the ocean that illustrates the spoon-fed problem: Shrimp, crabs and saculina start out life in a similar form. They develop into a small swimming creature with some basic organs and appendages. After they reach this stage, they diversify into their destiny. With shrimp and crabs they proceed with the struggles of life and grow into creatures that take care of themselves. The saculina, on the other hand, become parasites.

They find an unfortunate, injured hermit crab and attach to the injury. From there, they set in a root system, from which they derive their life fluid free of labor. Their organs degenerate, not being used for natural survival, and they become sacks with the roots. This is a sad condition for that creature to degenerate into.

As we see in the “Pastor/Congregation” system, (the failure to produce a consistent batch of active disciples, who in turn disciple others) so we see part of this failure in the saculina. Such a system caters to degeneracy, atrophy and parasitism. Their muscles are not spiritually exercised and they atrophy. Their early eagerness to learn is quenched by the very method they are taught is the way to grow and gain more life.

Through the saculina, we see how the congregation develops a life-robbing dependency on the “Pastor”. He’s expected to MC the events isn’t he? The congregation sits back, having him conduct their services and ceremonies for them. They don’t have to seek the leading of God’s Spirit, for there’s some man who’s paid to do this for them. In fact, if you did speak up, this would be considered by many as being “interruptive” and “out of order”.

This system caters to our laziness and fearfulness. It’s easy for the Spirit to remove these obstacles, if we but seek Him (Acts 4: 29-32). What hope is there for the entire congregation to grow, as long as he stays in the control of the pulpit and its messages? This is a serious situation that can develop overnight with no real safeguards.

For those naturally shy, the dangers are even greater. They have their natural weakness catered to. Part of God’s true discipleship program trains men to look to Him for that holy boldness, so they can accomplish His work through His Spirit. For the man who may be shy, and thinks God just doesn’t intend him to be outwardly bold, I raise the challenge! I’m naturally shy. I hate getting up in front of people, but God has given me a ministry and He gives me the boldness to speak. I do it, not because I’m naturally that way, but because I see the Word needs to go out. I would be unfaithful to God to keep silence when there’s no one else to speak. Since I have been faithful with the open doors I’ve seen God place before me,

I've continued to receive His guidance, so I can help get His Word to His people.

4. God's light has to be approved by that single man.

If the pastor's closed in some direction, God's light is stopped there. Even a great man like Andrew Murray almost stopped a revival in Africa, because he wasn't prepared for the manner in which it came.

In brief: The event was a gathering for some kind of preaching services in Africa. They heard a roaring sound approaching. When it got to them, the people started grieving for their sins. Some were groaning deeply under the burden. Following this, there was an intense interest in prayer, bible study and Christian fellowship. Andrew Murray saw all this emotional grieving and tried commanding the people to stop and be orderly. His comprehension of a proper church service didn't allow for the display of strong emotions. The people didn't respond. Apparently it happened again a short time later. Some man of God came up to Andrew Murray this time and spoke a warning for Him to not stand in the way of God. The roaring came and the people were filled with conviction. This time he kept silence.

Fortunately, Andrew Murray did have some flexibility. Nevertheless, the lesson is still there. For those who will not bend to the hand of God in some area, light will be stopped. He may even consider it his duty to stop it, through the blockage in his spiritual vision. After all, remember the disciples declaring to Jesus how they defended His reputation, commanding someone who wasn't with them to stop ministering in His name (Mark 9:38-40).

The plurality of elders helps lead to success, but the danger can also exist with a board of elders. The odds of failure are greatly decreased when there are numbers involved to help correct. Consider Paul's rebuke of Peter recorded in Galatians 2:1-14.

We find a number of churches gone-bad addressed in Revelation 2 and 3. It's important to note that a number of those churches did show evidence, from Jesus' rebukes, of having replaced the "elder's example" method with a number of other systems. Some were

still properly founded as far as church government was concerned (the Ephesian Church), but had turned from the straight and narrow in life. All this shows that the danger is always so great in blocking the light of God, even more so without the check system of multiple men who will earnestly seek God.

The God ordained method for a spiritual immune system, as it were, for the body of Christ, which is the church, is shut down. Body life can be shut down in a moment. Considering the biblical basis for any local church to form is the grounds of the body, this means the church can turn in moments into a sect. A sect is a gathering that has something other than Christ in control, for it is no longer His body in action. It is something beyond that, and so fails to be His any more.

I have some examples in the chapter on Elders, but for now let me illustrate it this way: Say a “Pastor” sees something in the church that isn’t right. He considers it, and decides it isn’t worth risking a split in the church. The scriptures call for a confrontation. Someone else also is concerned and brings it up to the “Pastor”. He listens, but has already decided on the course of no resistance. The body’s immune system would blow the trumpet before the board of elders. The collective consciousness must account for this and issue a biblical response. The body should work to set sufficient antibodies at work to destroy the invading sin. Christ raises the call in His word. The brethren respond and the plurality of elders is held responsible to call to account. To dismiss the problem with a trifle is no easy matter.

With a “Chief Pastor”, the collective consciousness is easily abandoned, since the responsibility is left for the “Head” to make the call. For the “Subject Elders” of the “Pastor” to demand the “Pastor” follow through or “fire” him, the neglect usually has to be excessive, by general standards. This allows for a lot of “neglected” sins, before a forced action will actually be pressed through. That single hardened “Pastor” can act as a shut off valve for the life of the body’s operation. In that dangerous misuse, the body is no longer able to function under the leadership of the biblical Head - Christ! This “Pastor” effectively rules the roost, and Christ no

longer can, hence a substitute head for the body, a sect.

5. All the devil has to do to lead astray an assembly, is to find the weakness of the “Pastor”. The devil can exploit that weakness to unwittingly manipulate him.

Such a manipulated man can train his congregation in the direction of the teaching he wants them to accept which plays to that exploited weakness. Of course, that depends on the type of weakness. Some deviations are too obvious. However, many a “Pastor” has effectively controlled the opinions of “his” congregation. They have learned to trust him and lend a lot of trust to his judgments.

6. With a single man in the pulpit, an enforced training by a darkened man can result.

Though the “pulpit” discipleship program is poor, it does offer some food. That little food which some receive is all they get, so for the “Pastor” to stray spells almost certain ruin for many.

If that “Chief Pastor” goes astray, a real danger in the “pulpit” appears in the messages he delivers. His “straying” may not be something obvious, but the flow of the Spirit will be quenched. For God’s work to be effectively done, the man must be God’s man. God uses some men despite themselves, but that isn’t God’s standard way. Consider it the exception.

The whole congregation will be stuck with a man who somehow is lacking the force of life. He may deliver very good messages, with lots of information, but without the Spirit, which he has quenched, his messages will have a mark of death. The congregation is stuck being constantly fed by someone who has lost God’s touch. They may sense death in the services, but not be able to put their finger on it. They feel dry and wonder if there is more in the Christian life. They might decide to hit the road looking for a “more exciting” church. Searching, while the problem was right before them, only they couldn’t put their finger on it. I fear this problem happens much more than we would ever like to imagine. God’s partial answer lies in the “Plurality of Elders”.

7. A serious flaw is the natural limitation of that single man.

The single man in control poses the danger of his limited growth. He cannot help others to see what he himself hasn't seen. If he hasn't seen the importance of fleeing the television as one of the present greatest dangers to the modern church, he certainly won't warn the congregation from the pulpit. If he hasn't really seen the great importance of the message contained in the first chapter in this book, he won't feel the compulsion to see the congregation comes to a revelation of these facts themselves.

With the plurality of elders, we have the broad growth of all the men compounded together to help sharpen each other, and to all deliver what God has enabled them to see.