

Reforming the Evangelical Pastorate

Selected Scriptures

September 25, 2021

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. Uh, this is a message that is themed around uh, reforming the evangelical pastorates. We've heard about reforming the evangelical pulpit and this is about reforming the evangelical pastorate, the pastorate itself. 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

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 the book of Acts, the shepherded model is gone." End quote. Such a cavalier attitude, toward the pastorate, toward biblical things, toward the things that Pastor Don Green just preached to us, out of John 21. Such a cavalier attitude toward those 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 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, this is the book that you've received from Alex Strauch as a gift to you on Acts 20. And it says in verse 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 fact, just to set this up, turn over to Ezekiel 34, Ezekiel 34, very hard hitting passage, for those in leadership. God is so fond of this metaphor of a shepherd, that it doesn't matter what age we live in, he is not going to abandon it just because times change. 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, and for those who don't follow that, for those who spurn it, for those who rejected it, malign it, scorn and mock it.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

Here's what God says, Ezekiel 34 verse 1, "The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who've been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep." In other words, they fleece the flock, and even kill the flock in order to feed themselves.

Verse 4, "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them." Reminds me of one pastor speaking to, 'bout shepherding, who said, "If they're not on the bus, they better get out of the way because the bus is gonna run them over." That a, heart of a shepherd?

"With harshness and severity you've ruled them." So verse 5, "they were scattered." When the man who spoke those words was dethroned from his perch, that flock entirely scattered. It was

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

a mess, scattered because there was no shepherd. "They became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep are scattered; they wandered all over the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with none, to search or to seek for them."

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.

Look at verse 7. "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 'As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep had become a prey, and because my sheep have become food for all the wild beast, since there were no shepherds, because my shepherds haven't searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, here the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I'll rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they might not be food for them.'"

When he has to reach into the mouth of a shepherd to pull the head of a sheep out of it, what is he describing? A wolf. 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.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

After ridding himself of false shepherds, God, he takes up the task for himself and he shows us all how to get it done. This is get it done leadership, from God's perspective. Look at verse 11. "For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, myself," there's an emphasis there, him personally, "I will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I'll rescue them from all the places where they've been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

"I'll bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, I'll bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I'll feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel," shall their grazing, "shall be their grazing land, and they shall lie down in good grazing land, on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD, I'll seek the lost, I'll bring back the strayed, I will bind up

the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, fat and the strong  
I'll destroy. I'll feed them in justice.

"As for you, my flock, says the Lord God, Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; then to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet?"

Look ahead at verse 23, because God is going to shepherd his people through David's greater son, verse 23, says, "I'll sh, set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken." 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, as Don Green just preached for us. 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.

If you want to jot some things down in your notes, you can say pastors are, number one, pastors are first, bold preachers of God's gospel. Pastors are 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, that 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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 separate folder of doctrinal content at, strike that, each word 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, we've seen this on what we call Red Team, where 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

# GRACE CHURCH



Grace

---

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 is an individualistic Christian spirituality, as a means to psychological fulfillment to reach their full potential. It's the pathway to becoming a better you. 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.

Don mentioned, 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 as we've said, 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. 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's a chunk. His 31 messages are stretched over more than a year from January 6th, 2019 to January 19th of 2020. That is giving rather short shrift to the most important doctrinal treatment of the gospel in Scripture.

You think the Summit View congregations, plural, they, they stream Mr. Greer's preaching to multiple locations. You think they're better off, or worse off? For this approach, those

# GRACE CHURCH



Grace

flocks healthier, stronger, more deeply anchored with this overview style of preaching. I visited Grace to You's website to see how John MacArthur handled Romans. His expository series, he preached 121 messages, which is rush, 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. M.L.J. breaks open the bones and sucks out the marrow of the text. 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 truth 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

unto salvation, for all who believe. Guarantee you, if we jumped into our time machine, we would hear depth from the Apostle Paul. He joyfully expounded the rich truths of scripture, of the gospel of God.

So can we assume this author of Romans would do any less? Would he give 31 messages? He preached at one time so late into the evening, so late into the evening poor Eutychus fell from the window, had to be revived by the Apostle Paul. Why was he preaching that long, because he's boring? He was enthralled with the God of the gospel. So the pastor majors on the gospel, he sees his job as taking people deep, deep, deep into the doctrine of God's gospel, which gives them understanding in the truth, which is the anchor for all of life.

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



# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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. And it contains exhortation, it contains admonition, it comes with the voice of command, it should leave your proud heart troubled, bothered, provoked, and at times, it should take your troubled conscience and apply the balm to it. It gives you assurance and comfort and joy and satisfaction and peace. 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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

When, another observation, number three, noticing 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 in your list, 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 Phil, 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, deepen 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. Be a man. 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.

In a 2015 article, "*Virtual Preaching Transforms Sunday Sermons.*" John Blake, CNN. He tells about what he saw and witnessed when he attended the Dallas campus of Ed Young Junior's Fellowship Church. Blake writes this, "The lights in the sanctuary suddenly dimmed, and members of the Church hushed as they peered at a pulpit shrouded in darkness." Truer words have never been spoken. I just caught that. Well written, that was good stuff.

"The parishioners then erupted in cheers and whistles as Ed Young, the church's senior pastor emerged from the darkness with a microphone in hand. 'Please be seated. Please be seated.' Young said, as he grabbed the Bible. 'How you guys doing today?

Doing well?' Young delivered his sermon. But he couldn't hear or see his congregation respond. He wasn't physically there.

Young's parishioners were instead looking at a high def video image of their pastor beamed into their sanctuary from a mother church in Grapevine, Texas." End quote.

Ed Young Junior goes on to tell Blake, he says, "It's so real, that people have come up after service to see me and other people are saying, 'Dude he's on video.'" Don't be so distracted by this man's callousness, that you miss the fact that people are naturally inclined to come up after service. Why do they do that? They have this instinctive response to go to an actual place, at a particular time to meet an actual person, a pastor and talk to him face to face.

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.

Secondly, pastors are not only bold preachers of God's gospel, but verse 3, pastors are diligent seekers of God's approval. 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 are, 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. The article got a lot of notice then, but its lasting value is the insight that it provides into the mainstream view of mainstream evangelicalism. 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 here's the criteria that the authors use to determine what an evangelical is and who could be qualified to come on this list. They say, quote, "Evangelicals come from many

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

different Christian denominations, but they all have a common belief in the holiness of Scripture and the centrality of faith in Jesus Christ for their lives." That's it, the holiness of Scripture, and the centrality of faith in Jesus Christ for their lives. If those terms are biblically defined, if they're explicated by the doctrines of Scripture, okay, we're in good shape. We can tell by the list that they compiled that there are a few loose wires there.

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, don't even know or preach the gospel. They're word of faith, health, wealth, prosperity teachers. T.D. Jakes is, 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.

# GRACE CHURCH



Greeley

---

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 sermon, 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.

As Phil said last night, 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. Jean Green quotes the Athenian poet Eupolis, who describes the flatterer's technique in his day. Eupolis says this, he says, "When I catch sight of a man who is rich and thick," That is well fed.

"I at once get my hooks into him. If this moneybags happens to say anything, I praise him vehemently. I express my amazement, pretending to find delight in his words." 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. Watch out for those who always do that. Who's always scolding and browbeating. That's a problem too, but a problem of a different kind. I don't think it's the chief problem of age. Watch your wallet around someone who's always affirming you, coddling you, praising you because he's probably around the back picking your pocket.

"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's, whatever it is that satisfies their endlessly bubbling heart of idolatry, churning up more and more fleshly desire for them to chase.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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 reproveth, rebukes and exhorts, even with patience in teaching, 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 reproveth 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.

This is our third point, pastors are eager and cheerful as number three, gentle laborers among God's people. Pastors are

thirdly, gentle laborers among God's people. You may have noticed in that last point, as you're following along in your Bible, that I stopped reading halfway through verse 6. I'm gonna pick up where I left off starting a new sentence and for reasons I won't explain or defend now, textual critical reasons and what I've become convinced of, I believe this is the way the text should read. 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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, bedding 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.



# GRACE CHURCH



Grace

---

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, Phil was going through this last night, very difficult church, very difficult situations, he's always like a, the, they're, 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 imagery, 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

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

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. They're gonna run, not walk, they're gonna run to come under the ministry of gentle hearted shepherds with the heart of Christ. The harsh, the overbearing manner of the hirelings, the heretics and the wolves. They're going to come under the strict and swift judgment that's described in Ezekiel 34.

What God's people need are pastors with shepherd's hearts, 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. So pastors are, we can call that, if you want to, biblical counseling, 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 number four, righteous ministers for God's glory. Pastors are righteous ministers for God's glory. Now Paul looks, he's been talking about mothers, now he 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 four that he had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. *Dokimazo*, he'd been tested by God and are found to be approved, that it happened.

God approved him and then entrusted him with his 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,

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

that is not appropriate for you to not acknowledge that, to not acknowledge what that, 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. You're embarrassing me, wipe off those tears. Get out there." Gives him a little kick in the pants. Get out on the field. Yes, it's not uncompassionate, this is long term compassion. It's a compassion he has for a greater reality, sh, 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 pastors can be found faithful, and their sheep will be better for it.

Let's pray. Our Father, we love you. We thank you that you have the heart of a shepherd, you are the prototypical pastor

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

for all of us. You're the prototypical leader, the one who, to whom we look and guide off of and learn from and you commissioned your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, commissioned your son, second person of the Trinity, to take on flesh and to live a life like we've lived, yet without sin.

To die a perfect, atoning death, laying down his life for the flock, he was a ransom for many, he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life, most sacrificially, most ultimately, give his life as a ransom for many and that is our model. And now our Lord Jesus Christ commissions all true shepherds, he commissions shepherds, pastors, teachers into the churches to shepherd the church that way, sharing your heart, sharing the heart of Christ.

Father, we pray for this time in this moment in our, in our wider evangelical culture, we ask that you would bring repentance to many, many pulpits. As Don identified earlier, there's probably many of those pulpits that are unconverted men in those unconverted pulpits. We asked for their repentance unto faith, then for them to step aside and learn in the wilderness

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

of instruction. We ask that those who are real Christians, but have been following a wrong model, deceived and led astray by all the leadership seminars that have been being cranked out decade after decade.

We pray that you would cause them to notice the moment, by your Spirit, be gracious to them, help them to wake up, repent of their sin, repent of their unfaithfulness, to see it for what it is, and work hard to be shepherds after your heart. We pray for your people. The many who have been coddled and fawned over and flattered by false shepherds everywhere who are coming into faithful churches, we just pray that you'd help them, to stick with it, to stick with a true ministry.

It's hard at first, to get used to, stronger preaching in a faithful ministry. It's very difficult, but we pray that you would be gracious to them by your Spirit, comfort them with your shepherding heart and tenderness, and shepherd them into good churches with sound faithful pastors, with a sound faithful ministry. We ask that you even in this dark and perilous time, that you would be glorified.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

As Christ is lifted up in his shepherding heart is put on display, in the pulpits of many faithful churches around this land. We love you, Father, we give our hearts to you once again, you make it so easy for us because you are so good. And please help us to respond in faithfulness, steadfastness and the fear of God. It's in Jesus' name that we pray, Amen.