

The Humble Pastor

The ideal of a humble and godly pastor is one that many pastors strive to meet, and I believe there are many men that succeed in that effort, as much as any man can. They are God-fearing men, working hard at listening to their congregation, preaching the Bible as accurately and humbly as they can, and counseling those in need with understanding and compassion. These are godly men, serving Christ in the best way they can, and they are constantly doing their best to increase their understanding and their ability to serve. I believe God will ultimately commend them for their efforts. The churches they lead are blessed because of their leadership, and those in their congregations are stronger and more well-grounded in their faith than those in congregations who don't have this kind of leadership.

It has been said that Christ is the head of any church that is led by a pastor who is submitted to Christ. Let's take a good look at this concept. Who is the head of any organization of any kind? The head of an organization, be it a business, a church, a ministry, a government, or whatever, is the person who makes the final decisions on what that organization does. There may be a group of people who make the big decisions, but there is always *someone* who makes the little, day to day decisions that are required for the organization to function. So there is someone, a man or woman, who makes final decisions in any organization. In a church, that is usually the pastor. There are business managers, staff members, and others who make final decisions about various aspects of the church's business, but the spiritual decisions are left to the pastor. No matter how humble and godly he is, he will make decisions about the spiritual life of the church he leads. The more humble and godly he is, the better will be the decisions he makes.

Certainly the humble pastor will seek God's guidance in making decisions. He will pray regularly, and sometimes fast and pray with great devotion and commitment to receive an answer from God about a critical issue he is dealing with. God honors that kind of commitment to his purpose and will certainly bless the pastor's efforts at being faithful to his word. Nevertheless, the pastor makes the final decision about what the church does. God sometimes arranges things to happen in a way that the pastor couldn't anticipate, and in those instances, it may be clear that God has intervened for his own purposes. The pastor, however, makes the final decisions most of the time. The congregation he leads looks to him for leadership and guidance. He is God to them, as many early church fathers, such as Cyprian and Ignatius, taught. He is the authority on scripture and God's will for his congregation. He alone is responsible to God for those in his congregation.

This arrangement necessarily puts the pastor in a position between his congregation and God. His congregation seeks God and studies his word regularly, doing their level best to serve God in their own lives, but when there is a question about scripture or how to live the Christian life, they look to their pastor. So the pastor is their spiritual authority. They have willingly submitted to his leadership, and he has willingly allowed, even encouraged, them to do so. He takes responsibility for their spiritual welfare. His willingness and his congregation's desire has created a hierarchical structure that puts the pastor between his congregation and God.

No matter how humble and godly a pastor is, and how godly and Christ-oriented his congregation is, the pastor is in a position of centralized authority and makes final decisions that affect everyone in his church. He is the head of his church. Christ is not. No matter how submitted to Christ, how Biblical, how humble, or how genuinely spiritual the pastor is, he is the head of his church. This arrangement does not reflect New Testament teaching, nor does it facilitate Christ's work in his church. It creates a

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condition of what I call “structural pride”. It literally creates the clergy/laity dichotomy that puts the pastor above the congregation, and relegates those in the congregation to a lesser position in the church. The structure itself elevates the pastor to a position of honor, and the congregation accepts the pastor as someone who is more knowledgeable, better trained, and more spiritual than they are. The pastor, no matter how humble and godly he is, accepts this elevation to the position of clergy, and those honors that come with it. He may handle those honors with humility and grace, but they are given to him as a very special person who represents his entire congregation. This puts the pastor in a position where he constantly has to guard against pride. He is positionally elevated above his congregation with the special designation of “clergy”. In order to remain humble, he must constantly insist that he is no better than anyone else, because the structure positionally elevates him above everyone else. The opportunity to use his power for his own benefit is a regular temptation. Counseling needy women creates a temptation. Dealing with finances creates a temptation. There are numerous opportunities to use his power to accomplish things that are important to him, particularly things the congregation will never notice. Putting the pastor in a position of power like this is a structural flaw in the modern church. No matter how well this structure is managed, pride and temptation are built into the structure. Satan loves this arrangement and uses it regularly.

Not only are pride and temptation built into the structure, but the pastor has a job that he is physically unable to do well. It is well known that pastors are overworked and underpaid, as a general rule. Not only that, but according to a fall 1992 survey by *Leadership*, the following points were listed as causes for marriage problems in clergy families:

- 81% insufficient time together
- 71% use of money
- 70% income level
- 64% communication difficulties
- 63% congregational differences
- 57% differences over leisure activities
- 53% difficulties in raising children
- 46% sexual problems
- 41% Pastor's anger toward spouse
- 35% differences over ministry career
- 25% differences over spouse's career

In addition to that survey, a survey conducted by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth in 1991 indicates the following facts about clergy:

- 90% work more than 46 hours a week
- 80% believed pastoral ministry affected their families negatively
- 33% believed ministry was a hazard to their family
- 75% reported a significant stress related crisis at least once in their ministry
- 50% felt themselves unable to meet the needs of the job
- 90% felt inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 70% say they have a lower self esteem now compared to when they started in ministry

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- 40% reported serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
- 37% confessed to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend

Other surveys have been conducted with similar results. Clearly, something is wrong. If the pastoral ministry as we understand it was ordained by God, those who engage in it should be blessed and encouraged by participating in it, and statistics should validate that those who participate in it are encouraged and blessed by God for doing so. I don't see much blessing and encouragement in the statistics shown above. What I see is a clear indication that pastoral ministry as we understand it is not ordained by God. When someone enters into ministry with the blessing and call of God, encouragement and effectiveness in ministry should be a natural result. Unless you believe God intends to beat down those he calls into ministry, how can anyone believe that this kind of pastoral ministry is a God-ordained calling? I'm sure there are many pastors who enjoy their work and have successful families, but looking at the statistics above, these are clearly in the minority.

There is clearly something wrong with the notion that pastoral ministry, as we in the modern church understand it, is ordained by God.

The New Testament church functioned without official leadership. Leadership was organic. There was no hierarchical structure. When someone had a natural ability to lead, they led. Older, experienced men became elders. There was no seminary. There is no seminary or ordination requirement in the New Testament. There is no clergy/laity dichotomy in the New Testament. As a matter of fact, Paul says:

1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Eph 4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

The point here is that *every one* in the church has something to share with the group, not just the pastor. A humble pastor will preach good and edifying messages. He will counsel with compassion. He will lead with grace. However, no matter how humble and godly he is, he will dominate the activity of the church. He will lead important functions, or assign someone to lead them, he will control the doctrine of the church, he will be the controlling factor in church discipline, and he will determine which spiritual direction the church goes in. Members of the congregation may have input into what the pastor goes, and a good pastor will consider that input, but he will make the final decisions. His input is structurally more important than that of those in the congregation.

Modern church services make the pastor's preaching the central event of the meeting. Music can take a large part of the meeting, but the preaching is the central, meaty portion of the meeting. This is always the case. Unless there is a meeting that is set aside for another specific purpose, preaching the "Message of the Word" is the central and most important part of the service. The only people who share anything in the service are those on stage in front of the congregation. The pastor doesn't even consider allowing members of the congregation to share in the message or anything else on stage, unless he has previously approved it. It is a controlled event, and those who control it are the pastor

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and the staff, not Christ. Ultimately, though, the pastor controls it, because the main service is where the spiritual life of the church is defined, and that is the pastor's responsibility.

So how is Paul's statement true when he says "when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation"? If only the pastor, staff, and the music leader are allowed to share from the stage, no one else in the congregation is allowed to share. If the main service has hundreds or thousands of people in it, there is no practical way that Paul's statement can be true. It would take days or weeks for everyone to share anything. Needless to say, that just wouldn't work. Everyone would leave after an hour or two and go home. There are responsibilities to take care of at home that are more important than listening to hundreds of people share.

The only way Paul's statement can be true is for the group to be small, maybe ten or fifteen people meeting in someone's house. A house church, maybe? What a concept! I think scripture says something about that.

Act 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the **house** where they were sitting.

Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread **from house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Act 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every **house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Act 12:12 And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the **house** of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

Act 16:40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house* of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Act 20:20 *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and **from house to house**,

There are a number of places in the New Testament that mention believers meeting in the temple. These were opportunities for preaching. The angel of the Lord even commanded the apostles to go to the temple and preach:

Act 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

The apostles used the temple as a venue for preaching, and they met and preached there regularly. Jews attended the temple, although those in the church at Jerusalem obviously did frequently go to the temple. So the apostles did not have a leadership position at the temple, but they did preach there.

What we learn from this is that there is clearly a venue for preaching that the new testament endorses. I will allow that there is a place for a 'temple' of some kind where preaching is the main event. However, this is not a place that the daily life of the church happens in, nor is it a venue where the church recognizes a central controlling authority such as a pastor who has authority over the church. It is a place for public preaching and pronouncements, and anyone with a gift of preaching can give a message, not just those who are 'ordained'. The daily life of the church happens in people's houses, where regular meetings happen, and where *every one* has the opportunity to share and be ministered to.

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This kind of daily spiritual ministry doesn't happen where preaching is the main event.

I have to ask where, in a modern church, are the spiritual needs of individuals addressed? Certainly not in the main meeting, whose primary purpose is preaching. Sunday School allows some sharing, but even there, there is an agenda to follow that won't allow a lot of personal sharing. The only place personal spiritual needs are addressed is in a small group setting where everyone in the meeting feels secure enough to share very personal things. There will be many who say you must have leadership in a small group setting, but they are perpetuating the hierarchical structure of 'big church' when they say that. If Christ is the head of his church, human leaders must get out of his way and allow the Holy Spirit to work in the small group setting. That means allowing things that wouldn't be allowed in 'big church'. Sharing must be free form where the Holy Spirit can bring out a shy person who is afraid to share with love and concern, and where those with gifts of loving and pastoring others are free to exercise those gifts. If only those who are designated leaders exercise leadership, those with other gifts will be stifled, no matter how well-intentioned the leaders are. Love does not require control of others. Only when those who are afraid to share feel safe enough to share very personal things is Christ controlling the meeting. Even with humble and godly leaders, it is difficult for this to happen. The Holy Spirit requires a "hands-off" attitude from leaders who want him to control a meeting. There will be some need for direction in order to give everyone a chance to share, but the authoritarian or centralized control model stifles the Holy Spirit.

The modern church is stuck on the idea that there must be a pastor, albeit a humble and godly pastor. As long as the church hangs on to this idea, it will be perpetuating an unscriptural model of church and will encourage Satan's shenanigans within it. Look at the statistics above. There is no lack of immorality and power games within the church, and the more centralized the control is, the more of these things there are. The centralized model of the modern church is clearly unscriptural and does not further the cause of Christ. Christ accomplishes his purposes in spite of the modern church, not because of it.

The takeaway from all this is that no matter how humble and godly a man is, it is impossible for Christ to control his church the way he wants to when a man, or men, are making the final decisions. Christ must make the final decisions, and that is evident only when all those in the church are of one mind. It takes some serious love, understanding, and compromise among a group of believers before that happens. That won't happen in a group of hundreds of believers, and it won't happen with one man making all the important decisions, no matter how humble and godly he is.