

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

The minister's goal of making disciples should shape everything he does in ministry. He should continually be asking himself, "How does what I'm doing contribute to the process of making disciples who will obey all of Jesus' commandments?" That simple test question, if asked honestly, would eliminate much that is done under the banner of Christian activity.

Let us consider the ministry of the pastor/elder/overseer,[1] a person whose ministry assignment focuses him on a specific local church. If that person is going to make disciples who obey all of Jesus' commandments, what should be one of his primary responsibilities? Teaching naturally comes to mind. Jesus said that disciples are made by the means of teaching (see Matt. 28:19-20). A requirement for one to be an elder/pastor/overseer is that he be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). Those who "work hard at preaching and teaching" should "be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17).

Therefore, a pastor should evaluate every sermon by asking himself this question, "How does this sermon help accomplish the task of making disciples?"

Is a pastor's teaching responsibility fulfilled, however, solely by means of his Sunday or midweek sermons? If he thinks so, he overlooks the fact that Scripture indicates his teaching responsibility is primarily fulfilled by the life he lives and the example he sets. The teaching example of his daily life is simply supplemented by his public teaching ministry. That is why the requirements for elders/pastors/overseers have much more to do with a person's character and lifestyle than his verbal communication skills. Of fifteen requirements listed for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, fourteen are related to character and only one to teaching ability. Of the eighteen requirements listed for elders in Titus 1:5-9, seventeen are related to character and only one to teaching ability. Paul first reminded Timothy, "In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:12; emphasis added). He then said, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Thus the example of Timothy's character was mentioned before his public teaching ministry, underscoring its greater importance.

Peter similarly wrote:

I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3; emphasis added).

Who inspires us to deny ourselves and obey Christ? Is it those whose sermons we admire or those whose lives we admire? Uncommitted, soft-style pastors inspire no one to take up their cross. If such pastors do preach an occasional message of commitment to Christ, they must preach in vague generalities, otherwise their listeners would question their sincerity. Most of the great Christian leaders of the past are not remembered for their sermons, but for their sacrifices. Their example inspires us long after they are gone.

If a pastor is not setting an example of obedience as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, he is wasting his time delivering any sermons. Pastor, your example speaks ten times louder than your sermons. Are you inspiring people to deny themselves and follow Christ by denying yourself and following Christ?

But how can a pastor, by means of the example of his lifestyle, teach people who primarily know him as a Sunday-morning orator? The closest they actually get to seeing him live his life is a five-second handshake as they dutifully exit the church building. Perhaps there is something not quite right about the modern pastoral model.

[1] It seems quite clear that a pastor (the Greek noun is *poimain*, meaning shepherd, found only once in the New Testament) is equivalent to an elder (the Greek noun *presbuteros*, found numerous times in the New Testament), and is also equivalent to an overseer (the Greek noun *episkopos*, translated bishop in the KJV). Paul, for example, instructed the Ephesian elders (*presbuteros*), whom he said the Holy Spirit had made overseers (*episkopos*), to shepherd (the Greek verb *poimaino*) the flock of God (see Acts 20:28). He also used the terms elders (*presbuteros*) and overseers (*episkopos*) synonymously in Titus 1:5-7. Peter, too, exhorted the elders (*presbuteros*) to shepherd (*poimaino*) the flock (see 1 Pet. 5:1-2). The idea that a bishop (the KJV translation of *episkopos*) is a higher office than pastor or elder and is one who oversees numerous churches is

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a human invention.