

Articles and Sermons :: The Urgent Need For Reformation in Pastoral Ministry By Darryl M. Erkel**The Urgent Need For Reformation in Pastoral Ministry By Darryl M. Erkel - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/7/16 16:18**

By Darryl M. Erkelistry

There is much to say about the need for reformation within local churches and, in particular, the way we structure our church meetings. Discerning and informed Christians will rarely disagree with this. But how many of us will recognize the fact that our traditional notions of pastoral ministry are just as equally in need of reformation and restructuring? To give but a few examples where traditional pastoral ministry departs from the patterns of the New Testament, please consider the following:

1. Traditional pastoral ministry promotes a one-man rule known as "the pastor." He is the final word and rule within most "evangelical" churches. In contrast, the New Testament teaches plural oversight by men known as elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Phil.1:1; 1 Thess.5:12-13; 1 Tim.5:17; Heb.13:17; Jam.5:14; 1 Pet.5:1-4). Some churches, recognizing the need for shared oversight, have attempted to improve the traditional one-man rule by introducing a rank structure of "senior pastor," "associate pastor," and "board of elders." This man-made solution, however, still contradicts the pattern set forth in the New Testament which teaches a shared and equal oversight, not to mention that, in the end, it still amounts to basically the same thing: One man alone is exalted to a position over others and has the final word in church related matters! By the way, isn't Jesus Christ supposed to be the "senior pastor" (Heb.13:20; 1 Pet.5:4)? Although elders might be gifted differently and may even excel in specific pastoral tasks, there is no scriptural warrant for dividing church leaders into various "offices" with special, honorific titles.

2. Traditional pastoral ministry promotes lofty and honorific titles for church leaders such as "Reverend," "Minister," "Bishop," "Senior Pastor," and "Pastor." In contrast, Jesus taught that His people were members of a unique brotherhood with no need for elite and honorific titles (Mt.23:6-12; Mk.10:35-45). Not only do special titles separate the Christian brotherhood and violate the scriptural teaching concerning the priesthood right of the believer (Eph.4:11-12; 1 Pet.2:5-9; Rev.1:6), it also feeds the pride of men. In contrast to our present system of giving honorific titles, the New Testament teaches that believers were recognized by virtue of their humble and sacrificial service (Acts 15:26; Rom.16:1-2,4,12; 1 Cor.16:15-16,18; 2 Cor.8:18; Phil.2:29-30; Col.1:7; 4:12-13) — not by titles! It's no wonder, then, that the early Christians avoided lofty titles (as was common among the Jews and Greeks) and, instead, chose lowly and unofficial terms such as "brother," "servant," and "fellow worker." One writer has said it well: "The array of ecclesiastical titles accompanying the names of Christian leaders today is completely missing from the New Testament, and would have appalled the apostles and early believers" (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* p.259).

Contrary to our traditional and modern pastors, Paul wanted the churches to regard him and other church leaders as mere servants: "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor.4:1; cf. Acts 15:23; 1 Cor.3:5; 2 Cor.4:5; 12:11; Eph.3:8). When addressing the elders in the Epistle of First Peter, the apostle Peter simply refers to himself as "your fellow elder" (1 Pet.5:1). Here was his great opportunity to exalt himself with an honorific title such as "senior pastor," etc., but never chose to do so! Likewise, when the apostle John wrote to the seven churches in Asia, he merely referred to himself as "your brother and fellow partaker" in the trials, kingdom, and perseverance which are in Jesus (Rev.1:9). Does any of this sound like these were the kind of men who would demand or even expect (not to mention gladly receive) others to call them "Reverend," "Doctor," or any other ego-inflating title?

3. Traditional pastoral ministry does not promote mutual edification within the church service. Those pastors who do, usually allow congregational participation to a very limited degree. The average pastor still thinks that he and his sermon are to be the focal-point of the gathering. In contrast, the New Testament teaches that the local church meeting is to be a place where Christians actively exercise their spiritual gifts and encourage one another to love and good deeds (Rom.12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:4-12; 14:12,26; Col.3:16; Heb.10:24-25; 1 Pet.4:10-11). Most pastors, however, do not fully understand such truths, let alone implement them within the church service. Thus, attending church for most Christians is simply a spectator event — with only one or two doing everything — instead of a participating event! The question we must face is: On what scriptural basis can we justify placing our responsibility of mutual edification and ministry into the hands of professional clergymen? Why is it that a large percentage of Christians can attend church for years and know nothing (or virtually nothing) about their spiritual gifts or where they are to function in the body of Christ? Are our modern pastors p

roducing responsible and functional Christians or a generation of passive pew-potatoes? In truth, pastors must return to their God-given role of equipping and liberating the saints so that they (not merely professionals) can do the work of ministry (Eph.4:11-16). Hebrews 13:17 states that church leaders will one day "give an account" for their pastoral ministry. But what will they say to Christ on that day when their life-long work produced nothing more than infantile Christians who were expected to do nothing more than quietly attend, take sermon notes, and pass the offering plate? For further study, see my book *Passive in the Pews: A Critical Look at the Way We Commonly Do "Church,"* available from Church in Focus.

4. Traditional pastoral ministry promotes a "clergy-laity" division. The "clergy" are the professional ministers who are called and trained to do "the ministry," while nothing much is expected from the "laity" except to faithfully attend, tithe, and passively observe the ministry of the "clergy." In contrast, the New Testament teaches that every Christian is a minister and priest before God (1 Pet.2:5-9; Rev.1:6). In fact, the entire Christian church is a ministerial body with the authority to minister and exercise their spiritual gifts for the common good (Rom.12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:4-11; 14:12,26; Eph.4:11-16; Col.3:16; 1 Pet.4:10-11). This being true, on what scriptural basis do we divide the church into two classes of people: "clergy" and "laity"? Since words mean things and since they can convey the wrong impressions, is it not clear that we are in dire need of language reform within the body of Christ? When a generation of saints are repeatedly told that they are mere "laymen" and that real ministry should be left to the professionals, why should we expect any of them to be zealous and productive for Christ? If every Christian is a minister, why are we not allowed to minister to one another within the church service?

5. Traditional pastoral ministry teaches that "the pastor" is to be the dominant, focal-point of a church gathering. Although others might be allowed to minister (albeit in a very limited manner), "the pastor" and his illustrious "sermon" is to be the center-point and mainstay of the meeting. In contrast, the New Testament teaches that the church is to be edified and ministered by all the members present (1 Cor.12:7,14; 14:12,26-31; Eph.4:16; 1 Pet.4:10-11). This being true, why do our churches focus on only one part of the body— "the pastor"? Why is there no mention of pastoral dominance in 1 Corinthians 12-14— particularly when Paul is dealing with the very issue of spiritual gifts and their proper function in the local church? By centering our church services on one man and his gifts (which is what many "evangelical" churches do even though they would never admit to it), are we not, in practice, reversing the words of Paul in 1 Cor.12:14 and suggesting that "the body is not many members, but one"? For further study, see my article *Should One Man Be the Dominant, Focal-Point of A Church Service (i.e., "the Pastor")?* available from Church in Focus.

6. Traditional pastoral ministry views elders as separate from the pastoral function. It is common for us to think that while "the pastor" devotes himself to "spiritual" matters (e.g., praying, preaching, teaching, etc.), the elders are to do the "non-spiritual" work (e.g., church administration, property oversight, budget and finances, etc.). This is, however, clearly misguided and shows how we have allowed false traditions to influence our pastoral practice. The truth is that such terms as "pastor," "elder," and "overseer" are used interchangeably within the New Testament. Thus, all elders have the responsibility of teaching and shepherding the flock, as opposed to simply sitting on an executive board and making administrative decisions (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim.5:17; Tit.1:5-9; Jam.5:14; 1 Pet.5:1-4). Moreover, the contemporary distinctions between elders and "lay" elders has no biblical basis. The same could be said for "teaching" elders and "ruling" elders. The New Testament only speaks of elders.

7. Traditional pastoral ministry encourages local churches to look for pastors outside of their immediate congregations. Thus, there is always the need to form a "pastoral search committee." In contrast, the New Testament teaches that church shepherds are to arise from the church's own rank and assembly where they have already proven their spiritual maturity and demonstrated their ability to pastor the saints (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim.2:2; Tit.1:5). Sadly, most "evangelical" churches do not raise and train their own men for pastoral leadership and, often, the qualifications for oversight listed in 1 Tim.3:1-7 and Tit.1:5-9 are either ignored or down-played when evaluating potential candidates. For further study, see my article *The Pastoral Search Committee: New Testament Teaching or Traditions of Men?* available from Church in Focus.

8. Traditional pastoral ministry teaches that only those who have been properly "ordained" have the authority to "administer the elements" within the Lord's Supper. The New Testament, however, never once teaches or even suggests this. To say that only the "ordained minister" has the right to preside over the bread and cup is to deny, in practice, the priesthood right of the believer. We must never forget that the Lord's Supper is a community meal, not a clergy meal. I would encourage every church leader to secure a copy of Eric Svendsen's book, *The Table of the Lord* (Atlanta, GA: New Testament Restoration Foundation, 1996) which, in many respects, is one of the best works ever published on this subject.

9. Traditional pastoral ministry promotes a training system (i.e., seminary) for its pastors which has numerous inherent

ent defects and limitations. To mention but a few, modern seminary training—

(1) takes potential pastor-elders away from the life and concerns of the local church in which they will serve, and places them in an academic environment of abstract scholasticism—much of which has no real bearing upon their pastoral responsibilities;

(2) because of the numerous classes required, the complex nature of the subjects being studied, and the need to " cram" for soon coming exams, the seminarian is allowed very little time for deep reflection upon what he learns;

(3) leadership training and spiritual accountability is usually very poor within the seminary context. The attempt by some schools to form fellowship groups that meet weekly with a seminary professor for one hour, though well-intentioned, does little toward developing deep relationships between mentor and protégé. But, then, that is not so surprising when one considers that the seminary is merely a product of the institutional church, which has its own problems with accountability and intimacy;

(4) many (perhaps most) of the professors within our seminaries have never served as pastors. They might know a lot about systematic theology, church history, or apologetics, but if they have never served in a church leadership capacity, they are not going to be of much help to a potential elder in need of a pastoral mentor. In contrast to our present seminary system, it is the responsibility of the local church to raise and train its own men for leadership where they will learn what it means to be a shepherd within the very context of actually ministering to people (2 Tim.2:2).

Clay Sterrett has written, "Modern training is primarily intellectual; New Testament training is primarily spiritual and practical. Modern training emphasizes the classroom; New Testament training emphasizes life and experience. Modern training targets young men and women; New Testament training includes older saints as well" (Myths of "The Ministry" p .18). For an in-depth examination of the seminary system, see my article Are Seminaries Legitimate? A Critical Look at Modern Theological Education, available from Church in Focus.

10. Traditional pastoral ministry places great importance on a professional "sermon" without recognizing its inherent problems and limitations. To question the "sermon" concept should not be equated with questioning the need for teachers or teaching within the assembly. Nevertheless, the following truths must be squarely faced by pastors wishing to be biblical—

(1) the very notion of a polished and eloquent "sermon" comes not from the New Testament, but from Greek culture which placed tremendous importance upon rhetoric and grammar;

(2) the early church had an open system of communication which permitted questions or even differing viewpoints, but we, in contrast, have preferred a closed one;

(3) Christians do not learn as effectively within a one-way communication kind of format (e.g., the monologue sermon). They learn by being asked questions and provoked to dialogue. When this occurs, people begin to truly think, reason, and "own" the message that's communicated;

(4) while it is true that not everyone is called to teach the Word of God (1 Cor.12:29)—nor should we allow everyone to formally teach (Jam.3:1)—even still, there is a sense in which teaching should be more of a congregational undertaking with real interaction and dialogue and less of a one-man show (Rom.12:7; 15:14; 1 Cor.12:7; 14:26; Col.3:16; 1 Pet.4:10-11). Such corporate commands to "test everything" (1 Thess.5:21) or "test the spirits" (1 Jn.4:1) presupposes that there was some opportunity during the meeting to ask questions and dialogue over the alleged prophecy or teaching. But how often is this even permitted in our churches today?

(5) the zero feedback structure of a "sermon" contributes to being dull of hearing and helps to foster a spectator mentality;

(6) the "sermon," in most instances, does not go far enough. It is information-oriented, but that's all. Most pulpiteres fail to go beyond the bounds of pure information and insight into the realm of actually equipping believers for implementing the truths communicated. Thus, they are pastor-tellers, not pastor-teachers; and

(7) the New Testament never suggests that one man alone, week after week, is to do the corporate teaching (Acts 13:1; 1 Thess.5:12-13; 1 Tim.5:17). We should never seek to make any church expositionally-dependent upon one man

for its instruction – and yet, this is what many "evangelical" churches do. For further study, see my article(s) Problems and Limitations of the Traditional "Sermon" Concept and Should One Man Be the Dominant, Focal-Point of A Church Service (i.e., "the Pastor")? available from Church in Focus.