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PTH5513

Pastoral Care

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Pastoral Care in the New Testament Epistles

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Pastoral Care involves practical aspects of caring for people in the church and for those touched by the church's ministries. While a pastor may take on a large part of this practical care (mostly spiritual and emotional support), God desires for the pastor to equip others to also reach out in caring service (Eph. 4:11-12). Thus, pastors, chaplains, church leaders, and other Christians who use interpersonal skills to minister care are said to be providing pastoral care, which is generally given to those who are suffering, who are relatively weak or helpless, and who need some assistance in becoming stronger or comforted. Care can take the form of listening, visiting, encouraging, consoling, counseling, lovingly correcting, praying, and other activities. This paper presents a theology of pastoral care derived from the New Testament Epistles by examining several key images and metaphors related to pastoral care. These metaphors and images include the pastor as shepherd, the church as the family of God, the church as the body of Christ, the connectedness of members in the "one another" passages, and believers mentoring others going through difficulties.

The first and foremost metaphor that describes pastoral care is the image of a shepherd, which the Bible compares to a pastor. In 1 Pet. 5:1-4, Peter writes about elders, or pastors, being shepherds. Such shepherds should oversee God's people out of good motives and with proper behavior. Having witnessed or known Jesus to be the Good Shepherd (John 10) who commanded Peter to feed His sheep, Peter writes about the inner character and job description of a shepherd of God's people, always cognizant that the Chief Shepherd is Jesus (1 Pet. 5:4), Who was a model for all pastors.

For over three years, Peter learned about Jesus' caring ways during His earthly ministry. Jesus served as a model of a compassionate person who ministered and cared for the needs of all kinds of people, even those who were not welcomed by others. Jesus desired other caregivers to have such inclusiveness too when he says that caring deeds rendered to those considered least in

society are really acts carried out unto Jesus (Matt. 25:40), for all people are valuable to God. Jesus proclaimed Himself as the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of John, chapter 10. Mark 10:30-52 illustrates Jesus' character as a Good Shepherd as Jesus feeds five thousand people out of love and care for the people around Him, for "He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 10:34). Pastoral care is for everyone who comes for help, but due to limitations of resources and time, the pastor may need to transfer some aspects of caring for people to other responsible individuals or groups within the church. Pastoral care should flow out of love--the *agape* love of God and Christ--that desires to meet the needs of all who come, simply out of compassion. In regards to caring for the needs of unbelievers, such motives of love imply that pastoral care is given out of compassion and not primarily to convert them to Christianity, though such unconditional love will likely move an unbeliever closer to Christ, in accord with a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Peter writes his first epistle out of pastoral care experience, having experienced Jesus as the Chief Shepherd and having been a leader in the early church which was very generous in taking care of the needs of its members (Acts 2:42-47), which included praying to God to meet needs that could not be met by human effort (e.g. Acts 3). Peter exhorts the elders, or pastors, to "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. 5:2-3). Just as shepherds take on a responsibility for caring for and protecting sheep, pastors are men and women whom God calls to the responsibility of shepherding congregations of God's people. Just as Peter was told by Jesus to feed His sheep (John 21:17), so Peter exhorts pastors to feed their congregations, for shepherding surely involves feeding sheep. Analogous to a shepherd feeding sheep, a pastor should sufficiently feed people by teaching and preaching a balanced diet

of biblical truths that help people grow spiritually. Instead of just letting sheep get fat on food, a shepherd needs to give them adequate exercise. Similarly, a pastor needs to allow opportunities for the exercise of church members' gifts and ministries and to get them involved in acts of service. A pastor is called to equip others for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), and this includes the pastor sharing the responsibility of care for people. As a shepherd cares for sheep and knows each by name, so a pastor cares for each of his parishioners by knowing them deeply, by visiting them, and by talking and emailing them during the week. Knowing the condition of the flock, the pastor has a right to initiate contact with an individual if a problem is perceived or if danger looms. The pastor should be available to help counsel individuals in problematic situations or, at least, refer them to qualified individuals who can help.

Furthermore, shepherding includes protecting, leading, and guiding of sheep (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., by Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, 683). Just as a shepherd protects the flock from wolves, harmful animals, and dangerous paths, so ought a pastor be aware of the surrounding culture of the church members and warn against dangerous philosophies, beliefs, teachers, and activities that could ravage one's faith or lead one astray from God's Word and presence. Sometimes a pastor may need to speak a corrective word in order to discipline or guide a person in the right direction. The pastor leads others by example and word.

People must not be forced or coerced to become pastors: Pastoral care and administrative oversight must be done out of a willing and eager attitude that is directed by a motivation from God, out of love for Him and a desire to serve people, and not by a motivation of monetary reward, though ministers will be compensated with money. Pastors must not lord over the people in a domineering way where the people are forced to obey, perhaps due to fear tactics, but pastors should lead by example and guide people in a kind but firm way, so as to protect them from the harm of sinful ways and of unbiblical thinking. "The ancient shepherd did not drive his

sheep, but walked in front of them and called them to follow” (*NICONT, The First Epistle of Peter*, by Peter H. Davids, 181). Just as a shepherd will temporarily leave ninety-nine of his sheep to search for one lost sheep (Luke 15:4), so pastors should be willing to seek after (and initiate contact with) a church member that has fallen away or be willing to seek after spiritually lost people through evangelistic efforts.

The metaphor of the church as the family of God illustrates pastoral care, especially in Rom. 8:14-17. The Apostle Paul shares that new Christians receive the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9, 11), become “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (8:17), and become God’s children who cry out to God, “Abba! Father!” (8:15). Each church member is either a brother or sister in Christ, having God as his or her heavenly Father. Just as the family exhibits close, caring, and loving relationships among its members, so also the church should have a strong relational component. Each member of the church should reach out and care for one another, as a family does. Although God is ultimately the Father of each church member, the members often look to God’s representative, the pastor, like children look to a father, who normally exemplifies a respected leader that is caring and loving. While all within the family of God should care for one another, the pastor, like a father, should especially lead in caring and loving the church family.

The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is Paul’s favorite and most distinctive metaphor for the church and illustrates pastoral care, especially in 1 Cor. 12:12-27 and also in Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16. While Jesus is no longer physically walking the earth and ministering, He does minister from heaven and uses the church as an expression of His body that did touch people’s lives. The Holy Spirit puts believers together in a body type of relationship, for a body is a unity that has many members that function differently (Rom. 12:4-5), and thus every member of the church is interrelated and important just as every part of a healthy human body is important and depends on the other parts of the body. No member of the body of Christ should

feel insignificant (1 Cor. 12:14-17), and no member should feel he or she is the only important person (1 Cor. 12:21-23). With proper attitudes among the members, there will be “no division in the body, but ... the members [will] have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:25-26). Caring involves empathizing with others in bad times and in good times, and this implies an intimate interaction among the members to know the variety of times others are going through. Believers should suffer with those who are in pain, rejoice with those who are being honored (1 Cor. 12:26), and help restore one who has fallen into sin (Gal. 6:1). God gives the body specially gifted individuals, such as pastors, to equip other members to minister, serve, and care for other members (Eph. 4:11-12). As each member functions in the way God made them and reaches out to the other members in care, the church will build itself up in love (Eph. 4:16).

Another image of pastoral care involves connectedness between members, as illustrated by the many “one another” passages. Each of these passages shows that the members of the church have a responsibility for one another, to care for one another, which is expressed in a variety of ways. For example, believers are to “be devoted to one another” (Rom. 12:10), “live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:16), “accept one another” (Rom. 15:7), “be kind and compassionate to one another” (Eph. 4:32), “encourage one another” (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25), “love one another” (1 Pet. 1:21; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5), and “offer hospitality to one another” (1 Pet. 4:9). These “one another” passages imply that each member should respond to one another in love, acceptance, kindness, and care. Believers must not be selfish, but “regard one another as more important,” striving to meet others’ needs (Phil. 4:2-4).

Another image of pastoral care is Paul’s reference to believers mentoring others who are going through difficulties in 2 Cor. 1:3-5. Life brings struggles and challenges to everyone, and care is shown when experienced people, who have made it through a similar struggle, come

alongside hurting individuals and help them to make it through these challenging times. Pastors especially should help mentor and encourage those that God gives to their care. God is the one who ultimately comforts believers in all their hardships, but as believers grow in maturity from these experiences, they should likewise “comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort which [they themselves] are comforted by God” (1:4). Paul says that believers should reach out beyond themselves and minister to people who are hurting or struggling, by bearing their burdens (Gal. 6:2), by offering them personal comfort, and by directing them to the God of all comfort, Who is no respecter of persons and will gladly comfort those in need.