

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What to Look for in a Pastor

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Resolved Conference 2009

I want to come to you, maybe on a little more personal level if I can in this session. When you get to be my age, you can kind of do whatever you want I guess, and I just want to talk to you a little bit from my heart.

I understand the spiritual battle with sin. I understand that, because I've lived it for a long, long time. I understand how difficult it is to live a holy life. I understand how difficult it is to maintain pure thoughts, holy thoughts, God exalting, Christ honoring thoughts. I understand how difficult it is to guard your tongue; to not say unkind things, hurtful things, sarcastic things, painful things. I understand that you lose that battle. You lose all those battles through the years. I understand how difficult it is to be godly, the most intimate environment of your life, in your marriage, with the wife you love and cherish, with your children, with the people that are closest to you. I understand what it is to disappoint the Lord, and to bear the sadness of your own soul over those disappointments that are frequent, tragically. I understand what it is to live in Romans 7, and to do what I don't want to do and not do what I want to do. I understand what it is to be involved in sins of overt action and sins of covert action. I understand what it is to sin by not doing the thing that you ought to have done, by leaving great and needful and righteous things undone, while you preoccupy yourself with trivial things. I understand the spiritual battle. I've lived it. I've lived long enough to try to help other people fight this fight as well.

I was leaning over the bed of a man who was 78 years old, and he was dying and I said to him "What are your thoughts as you go to heaven?" 78 years old. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and he said "I just never got the victory over pornography." What! 78 years old? That is not good news . . . for you that are struggling at 22. That is painful. It's a long struggle. It's a long battle. It's a joyous thing to walk with Christ. It's a thrilling thing to see His hand on your life. It is beyond comprehension, and it is the reason why we sing to the top of our voice "to live in grace, this grace in which we stand." It's a profoundly joyous thing, but there is this constant nagging reality of the ever-present war against remaining sin, the world, the flesh and the devil.

As a father, I have been concerned about the battle in my children's life; as a grandfather, in the life of my grandchildren. I have been concerned about the struggle in my own dear wife Patricia's life. I have been concerned about the struggle in the lives of the people around me and in the church that the

Lord has given to me. I am more concerned now about you and your future in this battle than I've ever been.

I'm so thankful for the people who are here ministering to you this week, all dear friends of mine, whom I love. I'm so thankful for the massive spiritual impact they have on your life, but you can't live in resolved every week. This is not your life the other 51 weeks of the year. Being under the intense exposure of the Word of God and the life of exemplary servants of Christ for a week is a powerful experience and that's why you're here. And imagine, four thousand young people showing up for a conference on sin! That's a pretty serious commitment, and then hearing multiple hour long messages that confront you about how you view your life and how you view your Lord, how you view holiness and how you view iniquity. You are serious, and you are being ministered to by men who are equally serious. This is a glorious week, but this is not your life.

And my fear for you, is with regard to the church you go to—the churches you will go to in the future, because I'm very concerned about the state of the church. You need sanctifying shepherds.

God never intended you to do this alone. God never intended you to live your Christian life alone. You are not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, in order that you might stimulate one another to love and good works. You desperately need to be under the sanctifying Word of God on a regular, relentless basis. And I'm beginning to think that this generation of people who are heading toward pastoral ministry don't get it. They don't get it. Some of them think they're supposed to entertain non-believers, many of them. Others think they are supposed to be stand up comedians.

I think we need to kind of revisit this whole issue of what is a pastor to be because if you choose wrongly, it's going to affect your ability to keep the commitments that you heard Rick talking about in the last hour. You need to be under a sanctifying shepherd. Open your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 5, and let me just talk about this passage to being with.

I think we all understand that there are an awful lot of pastoral paradigms floating around. One of the bizarre things that's happened in our world is the proliferation of independent churches. It is on the one hand a wonderful thing because there needed to be a break from old line denominationalism which had gone horrible wrong, liberal and preaching damning messages rather than saving ones. We understand that. We understand the reason why there are so many independent churches, but independent churches are troubling for a number of reasons, one of which is they have independent pastors who answer to nobody. There's no outside controlling power. There is no superior group of mature, godly, experienced leaders who hold them accountable. It's a freewheeling entrepreneurial kind of environment.

And in that kind of environment, every man can do whatever he wants to do, sort of like the badge of your suitability for ministry and your accomplishment is just how different you can be. There is a

certain scorn of the past, a certain disdain for tradition. Churches are struggling. Somebody starts a church with that kind of mentality that doesn't go the way they want it to go, they leave and the church has no clue where to go from there. What kind of pastor do they want? And churches are paralyzed trying to pick from the myriad of options, not only people, but styles.

And I think we just need to go back to the very basic question. What is a pastor supposed to do? What is a pastor called to do? First Peter chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you," Elders, pastors, same thing. "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder, and witness of the sufferings of Christ," which moves it out of the equality level, to the superiority level. He is speaking as an apostle, not just an elder. "A partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." You remember he saw the transfigured Christ, and then verse 2, "Here's what I want you to do. As a fellow elder, shepherd the flock of God among you. Or if you will, "Feed the flock of God among you." That's the mandate. That's what pastors do. Feed the flock of God. We are not called to the culture. We are not called to revolutionize the neighborhood. We are not called to change the city, as such. That's an indirect effect. We are called to the redeemed. We are called to the elect. We are called to the flock of God. Maybe just kind of looking a little bit at the analogy, if God has sheep, and says to me "MacArthur, take care of my sheep, and you'll be accountable for how well you do." Hebrews 13:17 says we will be held accountable for how we care for the sheep, the flock of God. I have been gifted by the Holy Spirit. I have been prepared and trained by the church. I have been called by the Lord of the church, the great Shepherd, and I have been given one task; and that is to shepherd the flock of God, which is among you—the flock God gives you. And, verse 4 says, "When the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." The promise of eternal reward is connected to the faithfulness of the pastor to shepherd the flock of God.

In the twentieth chapter of Acts, and we're going to look at a number of Scriptures. I know I'm reminding you of things that are very obvious, but seemingly escaping some today. In Acts 20:28, Paul says, talking to the Ephesian elders, the pastors from Ephesus at Miletus, a port city nearby, "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," just to raise the stakes. Your responsibility is to guard your own life. Sounds like 1 Timothy 4, "Take heed to yourself, and your doctrine." Guard your own life, the purity and sanctity of your own life, and guard the flock of God. That is what you have been called to do. The Holy Spirit has made you an overseer of the flock of God. And how precious is that flock? Purchased with His own blood.

Part of it is protecting them. Paul says in verse 29, "I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves, men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." Part of shepherding the flock is the protection, the protection against those who come in from the outside and influence your flock. They may be pastors in another city, they may be television preachers, they may be radio preachers. They may be putting books, stuffing books into Christian bookstores, to which your people are exposed.

The outside influences that have the tendency to corrupt your congregation must be guarded against. You must be a protector of your people from all of those kind of destructive influences. And then, even from the inside, among your own selves, men will rise up. Perversity will show up inside your own church.

And the first duty of a shepherd, of course, is to feed. The second duty of a shepherd is to guard. That's why verse 31 then says, "Be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of 3 years, I didn't cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the Word of His Grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all of those who are sanctified." In the process, he says, "I coveted no man's silver. I coveted no man's gold." I don't do this for the money. Peter said the same thing, "Not for filthy lucre." But I am the feeder of the flock, and I am the overseer of the flock. And I am the guardian and protector of the flock. And where are we trying to go?

Turn to Ephesians chapter 4, again a very familiar portion of Scripture, one that is foundational and definitive in terms of how we understand ministry. Verse 11, "He gave some apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers", or pastor-teachers. What are we supposed to do? What is our responsibility? "For the equipping of the saints . . . for the equipping of the saints; for the building up of the saints; for the work of the ministry to the building up of the body of Christ, till we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." You measure a man's ministry, not by how many people he stuffed in the building, not by how many people he reaches. You measure the effectiveness of a man's ministry by how Christ like his people are. That's the only measure. Have they come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ? And there's only one tool for this, and it is the Word of God.

The measure of any ministry is the maturity of that congregation. That in itself says that ministry to the congregation that God has given you, is a long term experience. And the average pastor stays something like two and a-half years in a church. Do you think people who do that see manifestly in their congregation the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?

Turn to John 17, just kind of expanding our scriptural understanding of this simple basic responsibility. We could ask the question, "What does the Lord Jesus want from us as pastors? What is the desire of the Lord, who redeems His church with His own blood?" I think the answer to that comes in John 17, which some have called the Holy of Holies of the New Testament. Go down to verse 12. This is Jesus praying to his Father. "While I was with them," referring to His own, "I was keeping them in Your Name, which You have given Me. I guarded them. Not one of them perished, but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled; but now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not

ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.” Wow! Do you know what the Lord Jesus Christ wants for His own sheep; protection from the evil one!

When Jesus taught His disciple to pray, He said, “Pray like this, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”” The great Shepherd, the chief Shepherd, wants His people to be safe, spiritually safe. He wants for them holiness and virtue. In a word, He wants for them Christ-likeness. That's what He prayed. “I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” And here's the culmination of His prayer for His own, “Sanctify them in the Truth. Your Word is truth.” That's the mandate. We are following the great Shepherd, as under shepherds, and the great Shepherd's desire is that His people would be sanctified. It means separated from sin, from Satan, by means of the Word. Verse 18 says, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they themselves may also be sanctified, in truth.” Jesus says, “I have sanctified Myself.” He's the only person in the universe that can say that. We have to be sanctified by Him. He sanctified Himself. That is, He maintained His own perfection; His own holy perfection, in order that we might be sanctified. He prays for our sanctification; He works for our sanctification; He intercedes for our sanctification.

As a pastor, I understand my responsibility is not to the community; it is not to the culture; it is not to the people down the street. I'm not supposed to be entertaining to them, clever enough to suck them in. I'm not going to redefine the church so that nonbelievers are happy and content, and enjoying it. My responsibility is a very simple one. And it is to follow the great Shepherd in the pursuit of the sanctification of His flock, through the Word. That's my mandate. And my reward will be based on faithfulness to that. Or my lack of reward will be based on unfaithfulness to that.

The church is a worshipping people, and the ultimate essence of worship is obedience. We're not just trying to conduct worship on a Sunday. We are endeavoring to produce a sanctified life, which is a worshiping life, and that worship manifests itself primarily in consistent obedience. Jesus said “I sanctify Myself.” What do you think He meant by that? Well sanctification is conformity to the will of God. And that was true of Christ, was it not? “I only do what the Father tells me to do. I only do what the Father shows me. I only do what the Father wills.” He lived in perfect accord with the will of God. That's sanctification, and that is where we are headed. One day in glory, we will also live in perfect accord with the will of God. That's yet to come, but even now we press toward that Christ like obedience.

I think it's really hard in the world in which we live. You heard Rick talking about all the garbage that's pumped through every media format. And at the same time, the sad reality is while the world is becoming more powerful, the church, instead of fleeing the world, is running toward the world, to become as much like the world as they can possibly be. Ostensibly, to reach the world, and in the process, ignore the sanctification of the people of God, which is the responsibility of the church. James said in chapter 3 verse 1, “Stop being so many teachers. Yours is a greater condemnation.”

Serious stuff that we do, for which we will be condemned. What I'm saying is that we need to refocus on the obvious. We need to refocus on God's people.

Let me give you another obvious comment, the Bible was written for believers. Surprising? The Bible was written for believers. Maybe you never thought about that. The Bible was not written for nonbelievers. So, what happens when you decide that your church is going to be designed to reach nonbelievers? The next thing is to say, "Well we can't do Bible exposition. They don't like it. They don't want to hear it. And if we're going to reach them, we've got to do something different. We've got to find their kind of style. We've got to find their kind of music, and we've got to find a kind of message that they can connect with, because they certainly can't connect with an hour long exposition of the Bible." And you know what? They are absolutely right!

The Scripture is for believers. The Scripture is for regenerate people. It is for the elect. It is for the redeemed. We preach the Word to Christians. Look at 2 Timothy for a moment, and there's that very familiar mandate about preaching the Word in chapter four. Going back to verse 16 of 3, we read this, "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Do you see something new in there, based upon the comments that I've just made? All Scripture, which is inspired by God, is profitable for the man of God, to equip the man of God, for every good work. The whole Bible is designed for the equipping of the saints, the building up of the saints as we saw in Ephesians 4. Scripture is for Christians, believers. And when he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "I solemnly charge you, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead," I mean, that's some heavy duty stuff. "I command you, under the scrutiny of God Himself, and of Christ, to whom God has committed all judgment," as John 5 says, "which will be rendered at His appearing and the establishment of His kingdom. "I am calling you to account, before God and Christ, preach the Word!" To whom? To the church. Where was Timothy? At Ephesus. And he was failing to do this. He had to be told, "Stir up the gift of God that is in you. Hang onto sound doctrine. Preach the Word. Be ready in season, out of season." There's been a discussion as to what that means. Well, I'm not sure precisely what Paul had in mind, but I do know you're either in it or out of it, so it means all the time. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Whom? Believers. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. Wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers, in accordance to their own desires, turn away their ears from the truth, and get caught up in myths."

Boy, sheep need to be protected. They wander off into all kinds of dangerous places. Preach the Word. Keep the Word coming so that they are moving toward Christ likeness through their continued exposure to the truth. We are as pastors, the sanctifiers of God's people, at least the human means for that, by the Power of the spirit.

First Corinthians chapter 2 is, I think, a helpful section of Scripture when you think about the fact that the Bible is written for believers. You're all familiar, I know, with this. Verse 14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." And if there is anything of the Spirit of God, it is the Scripture, since He is the Author. In fact, "the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to him. He cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised," and he is spiritually dead. "But," the chapter ends, "We have the mind of Christ." The only person who is going to understand the mind of Christ, and by the way, the mind of Christ is simply the Bible. This tells us exactly how Christ thinks, exactly how God thinks. We have it. We get it. We understand it, because we are spiritual, and he who is spiritual appraises all things.

You can't teach the Bible to nonbelievers. They will reject it. And so what does the church do? In its effort to make unbelievers content with the church, it eliminates what the people of God need, in a time when the sewage out of the world is drowning the people of God, and they get no help from their shepherds.

I want you to look at John 8. I know there's a lot of Scripture in this, but can you think of anything better than that? This is pretty definitive here. You know I've been preaching through the gospels for much of my ministry life. I've been preaching at Grace Church for over 40 years. I've preached through Matthew, Luke, John, and I'm now working through Mark. And by the time I'm done, if I go another 5 years, 25 out of 45 years, I would have been in a gospel. I love it, but the one thing that you learn from preaching the gospels, is that the people never, never, never responded to Christ, until they were regenerated.

Now remember, Jesus is the greatest teacher who ever lived; the greatest preacher who ever lived. They said of Him, "Never a man spoke like this man." If anybody could pull it off with the nonbelievers, He could. If anybody knew the hot-buttons, wow! He even said, "He needed not anybody to tell Him what was in the heart of a man, because He knew what was in the heart of a man," because He was omniscient. If anybody knew what they were thinking, He did. He knew exactly what they were thinking. He could find the path, and yet, when it was all said and done, there were a few hundred believers in Galilee, and 120 believers in Jerusalem, and the nation rose up and executed Him, murdered Him.

So if you think somehow, that if you are clever enough, you can overpower this market resistance, Jesus didn't, and He was grieved, and He wept at the sinfulness of sin and the hardness of heart. I preached yesterday morning on Mark chapter 3 where it says "He was angry, and grieved at their hardness of heart."

It's in that context that we understand John 8:43, "Why do you not understand what I am saying." Why do you not understand what I am saying? "Because you cannot hear My Word." You cannot hear My Word. It's impossible. "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.

He was a murderer from the beginning and doesn't stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him." And you are connected to him spiritually. "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." And you are just like him, implied in verse 45. Because I speak the truth, you don't believe me. What an amazing statement. It's because I speak the truth that you don't believe. You don't have the capacity. Verse 46, "Which one of you convicts me of sin. If I speak the truth why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the Words of God. For this reason, you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

Folks, you cannot teach the Scripture to nonbelievers. And when the bible says "Preach the Word. Preach the word. Preach the Word." It is talking about the responsibility that we have to feed the flock of God so that the Word will sanctify them. You say, "What about evangelism? What about evangelism?" Believe me. The power of evangelism comes from holy transformed lives, lived out in the world and the proclamation of the glorious reason for that transformation, the gospel of Jesus Christ, coming out of the lips of credible lives.

Scripture is the single indispensable truth that sanctifies. And Scripture can be received, believed and applied, Jesus is saying here, only by the true church. Outside the true church, it is resented, it is hated.

Now let me just help you to think this through a little bit. Why is there such resistance to the Word of God? Why is it so strongly and so universally opposed? Answer . . . because non-Christians, by nature, like Satan . . . non-Christians, by nature, by disposition, are hostile to divine truth. They are enemies of God, Paul calls them. They are fully enemies of God, and therefore they are enemies of Scripture, which is the revelation of God, His person and His will.

Even Old Testament Jews resented, hated, rejected divine truth and revelation—killed the prophets. Jesus told that amazing story at the end of His ministry, about the man that had the vineyard, and left it to some folks to run it and said he would be back to collect what was rightfully his and eventually sent back some messengers. And they beat and abused the messengers. And he thought "Well I'll send my Son." And he sent his son, and they killed his son. This is picturing Israel's treatment of the prophets and the Messiah. It was Jesus who said that the Pharisees really had on their hands, and all who followed them, the blood of all the prophets. Old Testament Jews slaughtering the prophets of God? An indication of the hatred that even the people who were the guardians of divine revelation had for that revelation.

There is a controlling, dominating, irresistible, sinful force in the fallen human heart, that makes response to the Scripture unnatural and alien. And that remarkable statement, "Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe." You would believe if I lied to you!

So, if you want to have a successful church full of nonbelievers, lie to them. But as soon as you start unpacking the truth, they'll bring you down, or they'll be gone. No sense really trying to concoct a message to overpower that natural sinful hostility. They are dead in trespasses and sin. They are blind. They are doubly blind, having been blinded by the god of this world, 2Corinthians 4. Fallen man's thoughts naturally correspond to the thoughts of Satan, not of God.

So I say to you, warfare against Scripture is not academic. It is not psychological. It is not some preferential thing. It is far more profound than that. All resistance to Scripture truth is from the core of the fallenness of the heart of man and his link to Satan.

Now, even as believers, even as Christians, we have to face the reality that we have remaining sin—that there is still part of that fallenness very active in us. And it shows up in a persistent resentment toward Scripture. As a pastor of forty years, I've seen people that I've taught for thirty years fall into massive sins and iniquities. What went wrong? The persistent reality of remaining sin in the redeemed is still an ever present animosity toward Scripture.

So you keep preaching it and you keep preaching it, and you keep calling them to a higher standard, and you say it a new way and another way, and a fresh way and a different way. If you've preached to the same people for 40 years . . . imagine that! That's like a death sentence for them. Come on! How about a little variety? And how are you going to get them to listen to you week after week after week, year after year, decade after decade? How do you get them to listen to you? You come at it in the magnificent variety in which the Scripture reveals the same truths in all the different passages and parts. And you come at it from all the facets and angles that the Scripture comes at it. And it comes, and even though it's familiar truth, it's fresh in its presentation. The battle never ends, year after year, after year.

We all understand Romans 7, "I don't do what I ought to do. I do what I ought not to do. Oh wretched man that I am. I'm so sick of my own sin." Sometimes, when I think about heaven, and I think about it now more than I used to, what attracts me is uhhh . . . I'm kind of curious about the pearl gates, kind of curious about transparent gold streets, and a cube in the New Jerusalem. And I'd kind of like to see the shekinah glory in full manifestation from the throne of God refracted through jeweled foundation stones. That sounds kind of wonderful. And I really do want to have a long conversation with Paul. And I assume he might be a little more available on a one-to-one basis than the Lord Jesus might be in heaven, but I'd like to have that conversation too. But you know what really appeals to me about heaven—the absence of sin. Because the longer you live, the more weary you become with the battle—not only for your own sake, but for the sake of everybody else, that you've tried to carry along and help.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, and I think this is where you see a pastor's heart. 2 Corinthians, and he's, you know he's given them all this list of being beaten five times, and 3 times with rods, and

shipwrecked, and he goes through all those things that he had suffered physically. Then he comes down to verse 28 of 2 Corinthians 11, "Apart from such external things, there's the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." I understand that. I've lived that life. People often say to me, "You're not as funny as you used to be." Well I don't doubt that. Life isn't nearly as funny as it used to be. The accumulated experiences aren't really that funny. I hope I still have somewhat of a sense of humor. But Paul is saying, "I've lived under the daily pressure of concern for all the churches." That's not administrative load folks, that's the passion of your heart for the care of the flock, and then he defines it this way, "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" You know the weariness of the ministry folks . . . the weariness of the ministry, is trying to move these people, and your own heart toward Christ likeness, and having to deal with all the failures, and all the weaknesses, and all the struggles. I tell my people sometimes, I'm not going to die trying to do this, because I can't get you there, but I'm going to give all that I've got in life to try to move you toward Christ likeness. I know we're going to fall short of that, but some of you are making it needlessly difficult, and I just want to let you know, If when you do get to heaven, and are perfect, I don't walk up and say "hello," it's because I won't know who you are in a perfect condition.

Paul's concern was the church, not the administration of the church, the holiness of the church. What are we saying? Our task is to feed the flock of God, to feed the flock of God the Word of God, which they alone can receive, which they alone can believe, by which they alone can be transformed, as they gain the victory over remaining sin, and rebellion, and resistance to the Word of God. Then they can go out into the world and live evidently transformed, triumphant, God honoring, Christ exalting lives, so that others are drawn to Christ. As the German philosopher said, "Show me your redeemed life and I might be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." We are sanctifying shepherds.

Another passage comes to mind, as we kind of wrap our thoughts up—a familiar one. 2Corinthians 10:3 "Though we walk in the flesh, we don't war according to the flesh." We're human, he means there, but we don't use human weapons. "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh. They are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

We have a tough job. We're given the responsibility to smash fortresses. The image here is something impregnable. What are these fortresses? End of verse 4, "For the destruction of fortresses." Beginning of verse 5, "We're destroying speculations." *Logismos* in Greek. Ideas, ideas. Ideas matter. They matter a lot. "As a man thinks, so he is." We are in the business of destroying ideas. What kind of ideas? *Kai* "Even every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." We take the Word of God and we use the Word of God, the truth, to smash every ungodly idea. "And, bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Make the will of God so clear, that we obey even as Christ obeyed.

We're tasked, aren't we, then with the holiness of the church? Paul put it this way in Galatians 4:19, and I think this is where we have to go as pastors to evaluate our ministry. He said this, "My children,

with whom I am again in labor,” That's the term for birth pains, “Until Christ is formed in you.” That's a pastoral mandate. I have pain until Christ is formed in you. I feel it with my own life. I feel it with my children. I feel it with my grandchildren. I feel it with the people around me. I feel it with my church. The pain never goes away. Back to Paul's words, “Who's weak without my feeling weak? Who's in sin without my being concerned? I am in pain, until Christ is formed in you.”

Being in the ministry is not about me. It's not about finding a people that like me, who take care of me. It's about finding a people, into whom I can pour my entire life until Christ is formed in them.

There's a strong negative here, a very strong negative. I have lived under the realization of this negative for many, many, many years. It's found in Matthew 18:6, and I'll finish here. I have said a lot more than I wrote down, by the way. And I actually didn't say what I did write down, so. Matthew 18:6, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me.” This is not babies. Babies don't believe. This is believers who are childlike, because you don't enter the kingdom unless you become like a child. This is a masterful sermon in Matthew 18, I think one of the discourses of Matthew that's often overlooked, where our Lord Jesus speaks on the childlikeness of the believer. We humble ourselves like a child. That's how we come into the kingdom, offering nothing, no achievements, no accomplishments. “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.” How you treat the flock that God has given you is how you treat Christ. Christ comes to you in every person, every sheep. My relationship to them is a relationship to Jesus Christ. How I care for that individual, is how I respond to Christ who comes to me in that individual. They're not for me. They're not to build me up. I'm for them, to build them up, to honor Christ that is in them, and to bring them to full conformity to the very Christ who lives in them. That's the positive.

The negative is in verse 6, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble.” Wow! If ever I am the cause of their stumbling into sin; if ever I retard the progress of sanctification; if ever I turn it the other way; if ever I lead them toward any iniquity, any sinful stumbling . . . it would be better for me to have a heavy millstone hung around my neck and be drown in the depths of the sea. Get rid of me. It would be better for me to die a horrible, painful, frightening death by drowning than ever to retard in any way, the sanctification of one of the Lord' sheep, one of His children.

Spurgeon said this, “I solemnly charge you never be the means of leading another person into sin. If we sin alone, it's bad enough. But if we sin in company, we have not only to answer for our sins, but also for the sins of others. There is multiplication of guilt increased by the transgression of that other sinner.” Spurgeon said “I have known ministers who were tempters of others. Their speech was full of double entendre, insinuations, innuendos which are almost worse than profanity. Such could defile a whole parish.”

The sanctifying shepherd understands the power of the flesh, and is protective of his sheep against it. He understands the power of the world, and is protective of his sheep against it. He understands the

power of Satan, the evil one, and is protective of his sheep against that power. A sanctifying shepherd gives his life to strengthen and protect his beloved flock life from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

On the positive side, a sanctifying shepherd understands the power of Scripture Truth. He understands the power of the Holy Spirit. He understands the power of prayer. He understands the power of confrontation. And, he understands the power of example...the power of example. "Be followers of me as I am of Christ." Be an example to the flock, so they can follow your faith. The goal of all this in ministry is the Christ's likeness of the flock. My closing word to you is find that kind of Shepherd. You don't need to do this alone.

Father, we thank You for the power of the Truth, its simple magnificence. Thank you for the consistency of Scripture. What a wondrous thing it is. What a wondrous thing it is! Even as we heard last night, and again this morning, to compare Scripture with Scripture, and see how magnificently consistent it is, and how it never deviates from the truth but enriches, embellish, shines new light. I pray for this generation, that they would have sanctifying shepherds. That they would have shepherds who care for their souls, care for their holiness, who are weak when they are weak, and weary when they are weary, concerned when they sin, who will feed them the sanctifying word. Oh Lord, raise up such shepherds, raise them up. Send away all the false shepherds. Send away all the people who want to do something other than this, and send your flock Lord, to the shepherds who will care for their souls. Help these young people, through Your church, faithful pastors, who in nurturing a whole congregation, enable that congregation to nurture itself in the wonderful richness of fellowship, among those who are endeavoring to be like you. We love You Lord. We want to be faithful to serve You. We want You to be glorified in Your church. You should be glorified in Your church. You desire to be glorified in Your church. Be glorified in Your church, by the church manifesting Your very beauty and glory. Sanctify Your people. Sanctify this people. Send them to sanctifying shepherds. Let them know the joy of living a holy life. Use them mightily to reach a lost world through the power of that life that has been really transformed. And we thank You Lord, and we are unworthy, incapable, apart from Your Spirit. Help us we pray, amen.

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