



Dr. Thomas R. V. Forster

Why Do We Need Pastors?

Why do we need pastors? Many years ago, I was asking myself this question. I was a young Christian, faithfully attending church, reading my Bible, growing in faith. And yet, I was wondering about the church, its ministries, and above all, our minister. I didn't see that much of him during the week; I saw him only on Sundays when he was preaching. His sermons were partially stimulating. On more than one occasion I was thinking: "I can read the Bible for myself!"

Obviously, this isn't the way we should view our ministers. And yet, some Protestants think like this. It all boils down to this one question: *Why do we need pastors?*

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul gives us a threefold answer to this question: (1) Christ gave leaders to His church; (2) Every believer is called to serve; and (3) The whole church is to mature.

Christ gives leaders to His church – That's the starting point!

Let us observe the context in which Paul speaks about the leaders of the church. The risen and ascended Christ has given gifts to every Christian, and here the Apostle moves to talk specifically about four leadership gifts. Paul mentions in Eph. 4:11-13: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Pastors and teachers.

It is evangelical consensus that the first two leadership gifts (namely that of apostle and prophet) are not given today as it was the case 2000 years ago. Just two chapters earlier, Paul says that *the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone* (2:20). One does not build a foundation twice. And thus, this strongly suggests that there are no apostles and prophets worthy of that title today. And then, we have the **Evangelists** – people who are especially gifted at speaking the good news to non-believers. Think of Philip or Timothy back then – and of

any missionary of today.

Fourth and finally, let us focus on pastors and teachers. Notice that Paul speaks of just one group of people with two roles. What are their tasks?

A **pastor** (= shepherd) is one who leads, feeds, guards, and cares for God's flock. A **teacher**, as we all know, gives instruction. In this context, a teacher teaches others the truth of God's Word so they can apply it in their lives. A pastor is called to lead, feed, guard and care for God's flock and to teach others the Word of God so they can apply it in their lives.

It is Christ who calls a pastor to this high office, and the pastor will have to give an account of his/her service to the Chief Shepherd (Heb. 13:17). *What then should be our attitude, the church's attitude, towards a pastor?*

The church should have two attitudes towards their pastors: First, **pray regularly and intensively for your pastors**. They are 'under shepherds', serving under someone else, reporting back to the one who has called them to this task. They will be judged by whether they have led and taught the people of God well. *Pray for them that they fulfill their duties faithfully. Compliment them for their service!* They are at the forefront of the spiritual battle. If Satan manages to defeat a pastor; it spells havoc to the entire flock of God. *Pray for them that they withstand in the spiritual battle. And let them know that you pray for them!* The pastorate is a very busy profession. It calls for a life of sacrifices. *Pray for your ministers that they stay true to their calling. Make every effort to help them in any situation.*

Second, **be teachable in the things of God**. Any minister must teach his/her flock God's Word. For this reason, future pastors spend time at seminary to be prepared with the Word of God. They must be knowledgeable in the things of God. Let us be willing to listen and learn

from a minister's knowledge of Scripture, be it in sermons or Bible studies. Make it your habit to raise questions. There really is no better compliment than by raising questions. Remember, a pastor is delighted to see that you are thinking along his/her thoughts. If you find yourself in disagreement with your pastor on an issue, do remain teachable and respectable. After all, your pastor is still the head of the congregation. Be active in theological education: Make use of various theological sources you can tap into, be it on the web or in print. *Remain a student of God's Word because learning the things of God is life-long learning.*

**Every believer is called to serve
– That's the goal!**

Paul says: the pastor's role is *to prepare*

God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (v 12). The pastor's role, along with the elders, is to mobilize the church for the work of ministry. Think of the Church as a symphony orchestra. Each musician must play his/her instrument well and together with the other musicians. The conductor coordinates the orchestra. Likewise, the pastorate is not a solo performance. But not all see things this way; they see that the pastor is paid a salary to take charge of whatever happens at church. One very real danger of this misguided understanding is that **the pastor ends up doing everything**: from preaching the sermons, to running the youth group, to printing the service sheets, to mowing the church lawn, to having afternoon tea with the elderly ladies. Whenever something does

not work at church, the people's first reaction will be "Where's the pastor?" I call this the Domestic Helper Syndrome.

It inevitably leads to what I call Church Consumerism. People think that the church exists only to meet their needs (whether genuine or imagined). This in turn leads within time to what I call Church Hopping (which some call "Church Shopping"). No church can meet the people's needs 24/7, and so as soon as they get disappointed, they just hop to another new church (etc., etc.). This cannot possibly be the way Christians treat the bride of Christ! And it is a million miles away from the church that Paul is describing here. Remember: *The pastor's role, along with the elders, is to mobilize the church for the work of ministry.*

How large is an average congregation in Manila? Say, around 200-300 members? It is virtually impossible for one person to get to know and care for even 100 people, never mind 200 or 300. If, however, everyone helps out then the whole church can care for one another and the body is built up. This is one of the most important passages in Scripture about the role of the pastor, because: (1) it affects how the minister sees his/her role; (2) it affects how the congregation sees the minister's role; and (3) it affects how the minister sees the congregation's role. At the end of the day, this is what counts: Your church is equipped to use their gifts together for the work of the ministry,



So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

to serve the body and to reach out to Manila and beyond. What then is the result of this kind of ministry?

**The whole church is to mature
– That's the result!**

The body of Christ is to be built up *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (v.13).*

The result of the pastor's work must be unity and maturity among church members. Paul's focus here is on corporate and not just individual maturity!

Very often we think that our main responsibility as a Christian is to be growing ourselves. But here Paul's focus is on the whole church. This is what Paul is saying: *Church members must become team-players.*

In my early twenties, I worked for a couple of years at McDonald's. There you are divided into different teams. And in each team, you have a certain task. The shift manager ("the small boss") had a keen eye on what you were (or weren't so) good at, so, he placed you where he thought you would do the best job. In my case, I was at the front, serving customers. I loved it, but I can tell you that it could be very stressful, especially on a weekend. And at the end of the day, your legs really hurt. What this job taught me most was to work with others. Unity is everything in that business. If the communication between those in the back and us in front didn't work, we in the front would get ourselves into trouble: the food wouldn't be ready on time, and then you had to face the customers – alone! ***Should it be any different at church? Can it be any***

different at church?

Learn to see yourself and your brothers and sisters as a team. Yes, we won't always share the same views – but still, Christ wants us to see ourselves as a team, working together, growing together. *Do not forget to thank your brothers and sisters for their work at church.* Life is busy, especially in our own time and age. And so, for many people serving at church is a real sacrifice. *Finally, aren't these precisely the words you would want to hear from Christ's own lips over your church?* "Yes, this is my 'dream team'." Isn't this what you and I desire to hear? Remember: *Church members must become team-players.*

And this then brings us back to our opening question: ***Why do we need pastors?*** *Always remember:* It is Christ who calls pastors to this high office (in your church)! Think of your church as a symphony orchestra – and you are one of the musicians, directed by the conductor. And finally: you (and your brothers and sisters at church) must become team-players.