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MINISTRY SUPPORTER QUOTE

Shawn Thornton 2
Pastor, Calvary Community Church

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How to Choose a Good Pastor



The Good Shepherd, c. 300-350, at the Catacombs of Domitilla, Rome.

YOU ARE VERY CAREFUL, deliberate, and wise about who you hire in your office. The procedures you follow relative to employment help assure that you get who you are looking for.

In a similar way, do you use scrutiny in choosing a pastor and church wherein you and your family will obtain a proper spiritual diet?

Many legislators and governing authorities simply go to church where their family has always gone. But, as illustrated in the first chapters of the Book of Revelation, churches change — and so do pastors.

This study — *How to Choose a Good Pastor* — will aid you in discernment when it comes to choosing a good, biblically-based spiritual coach for life.


 Ralph Drollinger

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Weekly Bible Studies

CABINET: 7:00 AM Wednesdays, Location Undisclosed. *Light Refreshments Served.*

SENATE: 8:00 AM Tuesdays, Rotating Offices of Senators. *Hot Breakfast Served.*

HOUSE: 9:00 PM Tuesdays, Capitol Hill Club, Main Dining Room. *Dessert Served.*





MINISTRY SUPPORTER QUOTE

Pastor

Shawn Thornton
Calvary Community Church



“God has revealed his views of who He is and how He views marriage, human sexuality, life, ethics, business dealings... just look at the book of Proverbs. It gives us all kinds of views of how God believes wisdom should be played out in everyday life, even in a broken world. So, when we are doing a Bible study, it shouldn't start with training in righteousness. So many ministries, so many churches, so many pastors want to run directly to training in righteousness. That is coming, but hold your horses. The application to life is coming, but first, with every Bible study, start with God. I say if people don't leave our services in our church with a bigger view of God and a smaller view of man, we're in trouble. Always start with God, who God is and what His views are.” cm

How to Choose a Good Pastor

I. INTRODUCTION

Today there are many thoughts as to what a *pastor* is or should be like. Some view him as a nice teddy bear who offers hugs and walks beside you. Others see him as the Sunday-morning event leader who is the good-looking CEO of a slick, market-driven outreach. Others view the minister as someone who can heal the congregants' physical ailments via touching the tube (flat screen). Others can't wait to get pumped up from this week's prosperity message. And then there are those who view ministers as impersonal and removed, black-robed, untouchables; outsider professionals.

In the midst of these varying perceptions of a *pastor*, what does Scripture indicate he should be like? What are your thoughts on what makes a good *pastor*? The answer to this question is gained by studying what are known as the Pastoral Epistles of the New Testament: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

II. PRELIMINARY PASSAGES

By far the largest number of

passages related to the *pastor* has to do with his injunction to teach and preach the Word of God. The sheer volume of those commandments far outweighs any other aspect of his God-given job description. This alone serves to indicate that the primacy of pastoring is related to teaching and preaching the Word of God.

A. 1 TIMOTHY 5:17

Note this emphasis as illustrated by the Holy Spirit in several passages: 1 Timothy 5:17:

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

B. ACTS 20:27

In Acts, relative to the Ephesian elders with whom Paul had labored in ministry for three years, he states:

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

C. COLOSSIANS 1:25

Of this church I was made a



minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.

In these three passages, the emphasis of the Apostles' ministry was proclaiming the Word. And as will be seen, this same perspective on ministry was handed down from the Apostles to the first-century church leaders as evidenced in and by the Pastoral Epistles.

III. POSITIONAL PASSAGES EMPHASIZING TEACHING

One of the main texts that underscore the prominence of the *pastor* being a *teacher* is found in Ephesians 4:11. Herein revealed is the kind of leadership that Jesus Christ has given and intends for the Body of Christ in His physical absence (in between His first and second incarnation):

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

Listed are four different positions of leadership that God advocates to build His body (cf. 4:11). Importantly, there is a distinction in Ephesians and elsewhere in the NT, between spiritual gifts — gifts which all believers obtain at the point of salvation — and those whom God gives as gifts to lead His body in between the First and Second Coming of Christ. Spiritual gifts are given to each member of the body (Ephesians 4:16); over and above that fact, He gives certain individuals as gifts to the Church to mature His Church. Wherein the leadership positions of *Apostles* and *Prophets* primarily related to the apostolic, formative years of the Church Age (as chronicled in the Book of Acts), the prevalent ongoing leadership positions given by Christ today are those of the *Evangelist* and *Pastor-Teacher*.

IV. PRIMARY PASSAGES EMPHASIZING TEACHING

The *Pastor-Teacher* is best understood as one person in Ephesians 4:11. Whereas some English Bibles translate the Greek

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Philippians 1:9

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment . . .



Similar to judging safety from danger is the ability to judge truth from error.





Samuel Adams



“The public cannot be too curious concerning the characters of public men.”

— Samuel Adams, Signer of the Declaration of Independence; Father of the American Revolution; Ratifier of the US Constitution; Governor of Massachusetts.

Samuel Adams, letter to James Warren, November 4, 1775.

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to mean *pastors and teachers*, a careful study of the NT on this subject (in my opinion and others’) supports the idea of one person and one office. In other words, Christ gifts His Church with a *pastor* who is a *teacher*, and a *teacher* who is a *pastor*; they go together. In a pragmatic sense it is difficult to effectively *pastor* without *teaching* the Scriptures and it is difficult to effectively *teach* without *pastoring*. Those who are *teachers* and not *pastors* should not be lead *pastors*; perhaps they serve better by teaching in a seminary or writing books.

In addition to a pragmatic connection, grammatically here is why many commentators believe this is the case: The conjunction *and* (*kai*), which is found between the two nouns, often means “that is” or “in particular” in the Greek language. Accordingly, if such is the intended usage here, *teachers* (*didaskalos*) is descriptive of *pastors* (*poimen*). I.e., “Pastors, in particular, Teachers.” This evidence is inconclusive standing alone, but consider the following: 1 Peter 5:1 and 2 states,

Therefore, I exhort the elders

(presbuteros) 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 (poimen) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) ...

The three words used distinctively — *elders*, *shepherd*, and *oversight* — yet interchangeably, describe the same person and position. I.e., *elders* and *overseers* are other titles used to describe *pastors* (translated here as *shepherd*). Notice the same in Acts 20:17 and 28:

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (presbuteros) of the church.

Later in the passage he states to these elders:

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopos), to shepherd (poimen) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Once again the elder and *overseer* are descriptors of the same person as is the *shepherd* (*pas-*



tor). Each name is a definitive aspect of the same person and office given by Christ to His Church. States one commentator, “These are different ways of identifying the same person.”

Now add the following: In the Pastoral Epistles, specifically 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, which reveal the qualifications for those who are called by Christ as leaders in the Body of Christ, the shopping lists of qualifiers begin respectively with *An overseer* (*episcopo*) *then ...* and *Appoint elders* (*presbuteros*) [who are] ...

Each passage goes on to define and describe the *elder-overseer* as one who is *able to teach* (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5). Follow the deductive conclusion here: If a *Pastor* is another name for an *Overseer* or *Elder* per the conclusion of the former paragraph, then it stands to reason that, per the latter paragraph, a *Pastor* is one who is *able to teach*. These various passages, combined, seem to conclude that every *pastor* is one who is *able to teach* the Word of God ... *A Pastor-Teacher*.

THREE DESCRIPTIVES of a PASTOR

Teacher (*didaskalos*) emphasizes what the *pastor* does: He teaches.

Elder (*presbuteros*) emphasizes what the *pastor* has: He has character.
And ...

Overseer (*episkopos*) emphasizes how the *pastor* functions: He presides.

Why all of this detail about a seemingly small point? Because it is a huge insight relative to the subject of choosing a good spiritual mentor/coach (*pastor*):

SOME PASTORS ARE NOT BIBLE TEACHERS AND SOME BIBLE TEACHERS ARE NOT PASTORS

Choose one who is both! Your spiritual coach needs to love and mentor you as he labors to teach you God’s Word! Don’t settle for less, my friend. You can see by my studies that I work hard at teaching in our capital; I want

The Capitol, 1846



Congress, 1854:

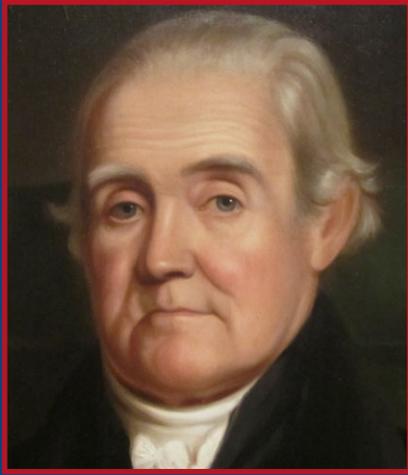
“The great, vital, and conservative element in our system is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and the divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

— Journal of the House of the Representatives of the United States of America (Washington, DC: Cornelius Wendell, 1855), 34th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 354, January 23, 1856; see also: Lorenzo D. Johnson, *Chaplains of the General Government: With Objections to Their Employment Considered* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1856), p. 35, quoting from the House Journal, Wednesday, January 23, 1856, and B. F. Morris, *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), p. 328.





Noah Webster



“The virtues of men are of more consequence to society than their abilities; and for this reason, the heart should be cultivated with more assiduity than the head.”

— Noah Webster, revolutionary soldier; judge; legislator; educator; “Schoolmaster to America.”

Noah Webster, *On the Education of Youth in America*, 1788.

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to work just as hard at being a good personable *pastor* for you as well.

As seen in the aforementioned passages and many others, the above are the primary interchangeable titles that God uses to identify those whom *He has actually given* to the Body of Christ today. Given this intel, God expects you, a believer, to cue in on this! Don’t choose a *pastor* who is not a *teacher*. Equally bad, don’t choose a *teacher* who is not a *pastor*! Add to this 1 John 4:1:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

One need discern if a spiritual leader is really sent from God by first of all asking, does he even teach the Bible? And secondly, if he does, to what degree does he teach it? Acts 17:11 states regarding the Berean Christians:

For they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:20-21 regarding true belief:

“So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven ...”

Choose wisely your *pastor*! Make sure he is teaching you the Word of God!

V. APPLICATION

Is it an appropriate and/or a fair question to ask, “How do I rate my pastor?” I think so.

Properly rating another (like you do those seeking employment in your office) relates to good judgment. Whereas God condemns those who possess a self-righteous judgmental spirit akin to the Pharisees (cf. Matthew 7:1), every believer is to possess careful discernment especially when it comes to spiritual matters. Perhaps the best way to think about this is as follows: One must be judicious. Whereas we all know Pharisees who are despicable in their condescending tones of pious self-righteousness, no one finds fault with an individual characterized by judiciousness.



John 7:24 states:

“Judge with righteous judgment.”

As a matter of fact, judiciousness — or better, discernment — is required in order to properly love. Philippians 1:9 states:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

Choose wisely, my friend, who will *pastor* you at both ends of your geographically split-apart vocation.

SIMILAR TO JUDGING SAFETY FROM DANGER IS THE ABILITY TO JUDGE TRUTH FROM ERROR

Spiritual judiciousness is requisite of one who desires to obey Jesus regarding inadequate or even false-teaching *pastors*. One need be discerning when it comes to evaluating good vs. bad *pastors*. Make sure, too, that you are not following a *pastor* who is simply flattering you; real *shepherds* will speak truth into your life at the risk of losing your

friendship.

Too often believers incorrectly think, “I’m not to judge” as they follow after ineffectual *pastors*, *pastors* who fail to ever mature their congregants because they serve up a low-protein Bible diet; non-discernment is another way of spelling naiveté or imprudence. Proverbs calls such individuals “*simpletons*.” “I am not to judge” can sometimes be a “spiritual cloak” covering a lack of applied biblical insight or necessary courage.

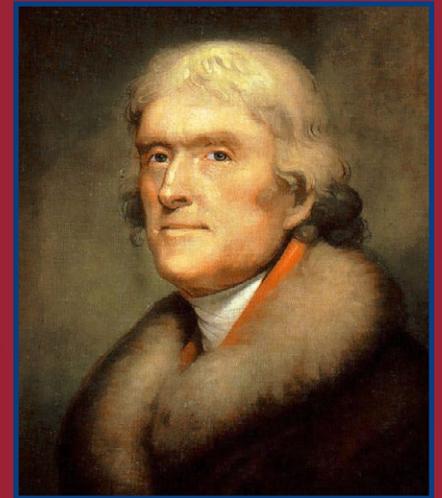
VI. SUMMARY

Put yourself in association with a *pastor* who will stimulate spiritual growth via teaching and preaching the Word. At the same time, put yourself in association with a *pastor* who will stimulate spiritual growth via shepherding your heart through the good times and the bad.

This selection will make a huge difference in your growth over the decades ahead! Hebrews 5:14 speaks about how learning the precepts of God develops spiritual judiciousness:

But solid food is for the mature,

Thomas Jefferson



“The practice of morality being necessary for the wellbeing of society, He [God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain. We all agree in the obligation of the moral principles of Jesus and nowhere will they be found delivered in greater purity than in His discourses.”

— Thomas Jefferson, Signer of the Declaration of Independence; diplomat; Governor of Virginia; Secretary of State; third President of the United States.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Ellery Bergh, editor (Washington D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), Vol. XII, p. 315, to James Fishback, September 27, 1809.



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who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Biblical laxity leads to spiritual naiveté. The ability to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) implies that one possesses theological acumen. Proverbs 1:22 states, "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?" States Proverbs 14:15 and Ephesians 5:17:

The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps.

So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Be discerning! Ask judiciously, "Does the pastor I'm following really shepherd me? Does he possess a genuine love for people as well as the skill and commitment to teach the Bible?" Those questions are emblematic of the kind of thinking and decisions God expects from you. cm

Handwritten signature of Tom McElroy

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