

The Pastor and His people
II Corinthians 7:12-16

The relationship between the pastor and the people is critical for the spiritual health of a congregation. Whenever you find a church that is prospering, you will find a good relationship between the pastor and the people. This is a relationship which is ordained by God himself since He is the One who places pastors and spiritual leaders in the church.

While the relationship of Paul to the Corinthian Church was more than that of a pastor, it was a pastoral relationship. Paul had the added authority of a New Testament Apostle which has not been added to the regular pastoral office, but he functioned in his relationship to the churches as a pastor must function. Actually, we have two pastoral figures in this text. Titus, as the emissary of Paul to the church, had functioned in the pastoral role for a brief time. From the passage we can see some of the important things in such a relationship.

It should be helpful to us if we will review the background of this passage. After Paul departed from the Corinthian Church, certain problems had surfaced. Among them had even been cases of open immorality. When Paul learned of this, he wrote the letter that we call First Corinthians to them. In the letter he confronted them and their wrong. Later, he sent Titus to see how they had received his message. Now, Titus had returned with a most encouraging report. This has prompted the Apostle to pen this second letter to them. From this exchange, let us look at the following things concerning a pastor and his people.

I. THE CONFRONTATION BY THE PASTOR

Paul had a true pastor's heart. He could not be silent when he saw something posing a threat to the welfare of the church. The first letter, as we have already noted, was an expression of this concern. His concern prompted a confrontation, an exposure of the problem.

But consider his explanation of the confrontation. "Therefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you."

You will notice that the confrontation was not an expression of anger on the part of the Apostle. The pastor may get angry with sin, but he must be careful about anger with sinners. Rather Paul's confrontation was designed to bring about good on the part of the church itself. The new International Version rendering reflects better manuscripts, and makes the purpose the provocation of church to express the affection that they had for Paul all of the while. It reads, "but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are." He was attempting to bring out the very best in the church.

The church should pray that their pastor will be this type of man. They should pray that he will not be timid when he sees something threatening to the welfare

of the congregation. They should desire him to be a man of courage and truth. However, some churches seem to prefer their leader be a "pet lamb" rather than a true shepherd. Paul was not a "pet lamb". He loved the church so much that he wanted to provoke it to good works, he wanted to speak to it in such a way that it would be at its best for God.

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE PASTOR

The response of the Corinthian Church to the messages of Paul was proper. When they saw the error of their way, they repented. This response on their part became a great source of encouragement to the Apostle. he writes, "Therefore we are comforted in your comfort; yes, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy Of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all." And then he adds, "And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, while he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him." "Comforted" is probably better translated "encouraged" in this passage.

We can Learn from this what it takes to encourage a true pastor. Churches in our day tend to treat pastor's like hirelings. When they want to encourage him, they give him a bonus or a special gift. Without discouraging you in that direction, let me point you to what really refreshed and excites him. He is most encouraged when he sees people receive the Word of God which he brings to them as the Word of God.

When Titus arrived in Corinth, he was welcomed with fear and trembling. They were not afraid of Titus, but they were anxious to do whatever the Lord would say to them through Titus. They were ready to be obedient to the Lord in all things. When he gave instructions on how to please the Lord, they responded with a whole heart. That would encourage the heart: or any true man or God.

Let me be candid with you for a moment. What is your frame of mind as you come to hear the messages that are delivered from this pulpit? How do you see the pulpit ministry of the pastor? Many, quite frankly, see the pulpit as a place of religious entertainment. They want to be amused and entertained. It should be seen as a place of spiritual instruction and equipping. If the pastor does what he ought to do in this place, you should go away knowing a truth that can be applied to life, with a clearer sense of the will of God for your life, more fully instructed in the ways of the Lord. If you want to encourage your pastor, do more than write him notes of encouragement. Let him see that you are seriously seeking to live out that which he has shared with you. Let him see you being obedient to the Word of the Lord. He will have all of the excitement that he will be able to handle.

III. THE AFFIRMATION BY THE PASTOR

This passage gives us some insight into the conduct of this man Paul. At this point, he is surely worthy of our emulation. "For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth."

The reports Paul had been receiving from Corinth before he wrote the first letter were bad. He had received word of divisions among them, of lawsuits, of immorality, and misconduct at the Lord's table, and of carnal display of spiritual gifts, and even some false teachings concerning the resurrection. When he received the information about the church, whatever he had to say about these matters he said it to the church. He sat down and wrote them a stinging letter. But when he spoke to others of this church, he continued to affirm them. When he told Titus of the church, he boasted about them. Now, he observes that it is real encouraging to know that they have made a man of truth out of him.

Can we not learn something from this? As a pastor, whatever I have to say of a corrective nature should be said to you, since you are the only one who can do anything about it. Whatever I say in your absence should be of an affirmative nature. We should never help the devil do his work. He is the accuser of the brethren, and he does most of it behind the brother's back. The member of the church who will go out into the community saying negative things about their church is doing the work of the devil. If we have something negative to be said, it ought not to be said unless it is corrective, it should be said to those who are able to do something about it. Surely love could do no less.

This is truly my prayer. Whenever I am away from the presence of this fellowship, I want to speak only that which is affirmative of the church. We will confront that which needs improvement together, prayerfully and privately, but before the world we will affirm each other. God will bless this kind of behavior.

IV. THE EXULTATION OF THE PASTOR

"I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things." Here, we get some more insight into the inner life of Paul. We can see here what brought joy to his life day by day. His joy was always in two things primarily. First, and above all, it was in the Lord. He wrote to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord." This was the way he lived day by day. He found joy in the relationship that he had with the Lord. But the second joy was the relationship he had with his people. Even now, he is rejoicing over what he knows to be true in the life of the Corinthians. He rejoices in the confidence that he is able to place in them.

What was his confidence in the church? He was confident that if they could know the will of God in any matter that they would attempt to do it. They had proven this when they had been given light from the Lord concerning the conditions that were prevailing in the church. They had sorrowfully moved at once to correct them. This had increased the confidence of Paul in them. This was His joy. He exulted in this.

You need to realize the special relationship that exists between a pastor and his people. Our relationship is not just one for time. It involves eternity. When our Lord comes again, I will have to render an accounting before the Lord for you. He will require of me a report for my days here with you. If you are an acceptable people, well-pleasing to Him on that day, I will receive a commendation from Him. But if you have become a failure, then I will hear

some of the responsibility. Do you catch of this joy on the part of the Apostle. He is lifted up with joy when he sees evidence that they are truly becoming a trustworthy, faithful, mature people before the Lord. So it is with any true shepherd of the sheep!

CONCLUSION

This passage has spoken to me in a very personal way. I want to nurture the proper relationship between the pastor and the people in this place. Nothing is more important than this for the welfare of the flock. Will you commit yourself to work on your side of it? Let's build a relationship in which we can have confidence in each other, and can together be obedient to our Lord. Who knows that the Lord might choose to do through us?