

Order in the Church and Pastoral Authority

The Lord has blessed me to be a student of Himself and His Church. My main line of learning comes through the Word of God and prayer. I also have been reared in a preacher's home, pastored the same church for twenty-seven years and traveled in preaching extensively throughout the United States and some of the world. Also, I attribute my training in education for the ministry and close association with great men of God, many of whom have either gone on to be with the Lord or are "taxiing down the runway." I precede my article today by this introduction because I want to address a subject that has given me much concern, especially as of late. I have never seen such a misunderstanding of the position and responsibilities of the pastor and an abuse of congregations toward their pastors as I have in recent days. I am receiving more frequent calls from heartbroken pastors because of rejection, usurpation, and sometimes, ousting by their congregations. I would also like to take this opportunity to say a sincere "thank you" to Christchurch Baptist Fellowship for their kindness, respect and Scriptural fulfillment of attitude and action toward this unworthy pastor. Let us delve into this subject with open hearts and open Bibles to see what God will show us concerning this important subject.

1. The pastor is the shepherd.

The Bible says, *"The elders which are among you I exhort...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof... Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"* (I Peter 5: 1-4). The pastor is to feed, lead and retrieve. He is not a cowboy, but a shepherd. He walks in example and the sheep follow. The sheep do not control the shepherd. The shepherd is the visionary; he sees the safe and good pastures. He battles the wolf and keeps the parasites off the sheep. He guides them in their walks and restings.

Many a church has mistakenly assigned a board that separates the ruling elder from the teaching elder. As best as we see, this violates a biblical principle as seen in the instruction from Hebrews: *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you"* (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

2. The deacons serve.

The deacon is not placed into the church to lead, he is placed to serve. Much disservice has been done to many a potentially great deacon, by educating him wrongly in his role. Why were deacons given? Hear the Word of the Lord: *"Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"* (Acts 6:1-4).

The word for "deacons" (I Timothy 3:8; Philippians 1:1) is translated from the Greek word: diakonos dee-ak'-on-os: one who runs errands; an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); one who executes the commands of another. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you will have to extend and altar the meaning of deacon to make this person an executive in the church who rules. According to the Bible and the best definitions, he is taking orders, not giving them. Please understand, the pastor and deacons work together. The deacons assist and at times, the pastor has the freedom (at his discretion) to ask for advice. In a similar way a woman submits under the authority to her husband, yet they are also partners. Do not mistake what I have said here for "a line in the sand" or a

declaration of war. Pastors and deacons are partners in the kingdom of God. Someone is responsible to report to the Head of the Church (Christ) on leadership matters and God has assigned that role to the pastor.

3. How the order in the Church is breached.

“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not...I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (III John, verses 9 and 10). John, the Beloved Disciple and Apostle of our Lord was having his authority challenged and attacked in the local church by a usurper named Diotrophes. This man did not have the natural God-ordained leadership as pastor, so he took it by his wicked talk as described by *prating* (foolish and tedious talk) and *malicious* (intending to do harm) verbiage.

When the order of the church is breached, the ground is first softened by slander. Slander is often spread by opening remarks such as, “...for the good of the Church and I say this in love.” However, the Book of Wisdom “pulls the cover” on this viciousness and faux care, *“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool”* (Proverbs 10:18). Slander is never an act of love. Slanders are uttered by those orchestrating coups in the spirit of Diotrophes, craving power for themselves. Hear me well, brother and sisters, on this point. **Pastors are not dictators, but they are to make sure that no one else is!**

4. What to do if trouble comes to the Church.

A. Follow the pastor as he follows Christ. Most any church has in the constitution a by-laws provision for a pastor who sins. If we seriously suspect a man of sin, we follow the order as given by Jesus: *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”* (Matthew 18: 15-17). First of all, this is dealing with sin, not a man’s way of pastoring, preaching, feeding and leading the church. The order of confrontation is one on one, then one or two (at the most) then if repentance is not done, go to the whole church. A special elite few are not permitted to be driving this action. *“Against an elder (pastor) receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality”* (I Timothy 5: 19-21). The ones dealing with the problems are to be witnesses of sin - never, ever following a wayward brother or deacon whom you prefer to your pastor.

B. Beware of the troublemakers who have no concrete evidence. Paul said in his dying words: *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware (be cautious of; be on guard of) also; for he hath greatly withstood our words”* (II Timothy 4:14,15).

C. Honor the authority and order of God and leave unsure things in God’s hands. Listen to Paul’s inspired advice of how to respond to a man’s ministry: *“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth*

me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (II Corinthians 4: 1-5). Paul was saying that he was faithfully executing his service as a minister and not even he was going to be the judge - God will ultimately judge. Even David said when persecuted by Saul, “...*Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (I Chronicles 16:22).* David left the judgment in God’s hands and God took care of it.

-Pastor Pope-

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