

## **Ministerial Practices And Procedures**

Almost two thousand years ago Jesus Christ declared, "...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16: 18). The church, the body of Christ, is an everlasting institution. It shall never be defeated. It shall never fade away into extinction. In fact, it seems that the greater the resistance against the church, the more it grows. However, while the church will never be overcome, it can be stifled and become ineffective. God has ordained a structure for his bride-to-be on earth. Our faithful Shepherd has placed under-shepherds over his flock. Such a responsibility and privilege is multi-faceted and will be presently discussed.

First to be considered is the broad topic of effectiveness. What makes an effective church leader? Standing tall over all other aspects is that of the leader's character. What good is it if the sermons are polished and the counsel is wise, if the sermonizer is pickled and the counselor is foolish? Concerning such a predicament, the apostle Paul writes, "...I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinth. 9: 27). Therefore, the effective church leader must be a person of integrity and consistency. He must be a lover of God's Word, hiding its treasures within the heart (Ps. 119: 11). He must know and practice the art of prayer, being drawn away to it often (1 Thess. 5: 17). Indeed, the effectiveness of a church leader largely depends on how effectively the throne room of God is visited and guidance received from the King of heaven and earth. Such practices are infinitely more important than seminars, systems, and surveys. And the church is parched from lack thereof.

As was previously mentioned, church leadership is multi-faceted. Accordingly, the Lord has raised up within each church specialists in different fields of service. These various leadership positions are listed in the Bible: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4: 11). Now, of course, this list is not exhaustive. Rather, it is the basic and broad categories of ministry to be found within the dynamics of the church. God so set up the church in this way "for the perfecting of the saints..." and "for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4: 12). This ministerial hierarchy will continue "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (vs.13). The effect of such a structure is that God's people will "no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine..." (vs. 14a). What sweet provision Christ has taken with his church! It is because of his care that we may become strong and fruitful vines.

Finally, let us turn to the qualifications and duties of the predominant leadership positions. The qualifications will be discussed first. They have been so clearly set forth by the apostle Paul that a rewording would be an exercise in futility. For the position of pastor, Paul writes:

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, soberminded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 2: 2-4, 6,7).

Concerning those leaders under the pastor's influence Paul writes:

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim. 3: 8-12).

The duties of these ministerial positions are also discussed by the apostle in the pastoral letter of Second Timothy. Here the young pastor Timothy was exhorted to be unashamed of the Gospel, loyal to the faith, strong in grace, and preaching the Word. In the letter to Titus, Paul commands stern action in handling false teachings, saying that their “mouths must be stopped” (1: 11). He further instructs to “rebuke them sharply” (1: 13). For all those that would be good examples in the church Paul instructs that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2: 1). Prescriptions regarding the right treatment of church members, widows, and elders are also made.

In short, the epistles of Paul are a comprehensive guide to the basics of church leadership. Churches that attempt to add to these biblical principles become more like a corporation than a church: constantly worrying over techniques and buying the latest books on church growth, they forget that the church is based on the power of God, not the wisdom of business. Those churches that attempt to subtract from the biblical basics become more like a fraternal lodge than a church: simply concerned with their own tightly knitted cliques, they forget the commandment of Christ to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28: 19a). By the grace of God, may the church be the church—nothing more, nothing less!