

“Our Churches Need Pastors Who Can Teach the Truth and Refute Error”

For the overseer must be...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:7, 9)

The shift of our culture toward a post-modern worldview is affecting the way that some folks view the church and the role of the pastor. On the church side of the equation, they are urging the church to be less certain of its answers—when relativism is in style, dogmatism is outdated. Regarding the pastor, the post-modern church doesn't need “a seminary-trained theologian dispensing truth”—when relativism and experientialism are considered chic, truth-filled theology is passé. This view of the pastor needs to be examined carefully under the light of Scripture.

When Paul charged Titus to see to it that elders were ordained in the churches of Crete, he also laid out standards by which to measure the qualifications of those men for this office. The character qualities listed in passages like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 properly receive great attention, but I am afraid that the ministry qualifications listed in the verses above are too often neglected. It seems that the contemporary church, both evangelical and fundamental, is content, if men have good character, to ignore the fact that God said He wanted men who hold faithfully to the doctrines of Scripture and have the ability not only to teach them, but to refute those who are contradicting them.

Please don't misunderstand me, I don't think we should pit one against the other—God wants both! Anything less is short of what God requires. I have been absolutely shocked at times to hear of churches that will call a man to be their pastor while openly admitting that although he is not a very good preacher, he really loves people, is a good organizer, etc. Those things are certainly necessary, but if a man can't preach and teach the Word, what good is that kind of pastorate? It would be like buying a car that has a great stereo system or a nice paint job, but has a blown engine. You buy a car to drive, not to look at or sit in to listen to the stereo! The primary task of the pastor is to preach and teach God's Word, cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:6; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2; 1 Ths. 5:12; Acts 6:4. God cares about the character of the pastor because it has either a positive or negative effect on the ministry of the Word. In other words, a pastor's character matters because he is supposed to be a man of the Word he preaches.

And our text above says that the ministry of the Word has both positive and negative sides to it. The pastor must teach the truth *and* refute error. Paul understood that the devil was actively seeking to sprinkle error into the beliefs of God's people. He warned the Ephesian elders to watch out for false teachers who would come from outside the flock and some who would arise from within it (Acts 28:29-30). The danger is no less real today, and one could argue that the advent of the printing press, radio, and TV make the threat even greater.

Any view of pastoral ministry that minimizes the preaching and teaching of sound doctrine is out of step with the Bible. The full-blown error represented by those who want to reinvent the church is more recognizable than the subtle error of those who try to minimize doctrinal issues in order to promote unity, win souls, or whatever happens to be

the issue of the moment. Contemporary evangelicalism seems too happy to minimize doctrine in order to save the culture; how else can anyone justify forging alliances between evangelicals and Catholics? Sadly, some sections of contemporary fundamentalism seem more interested in creating an appearance of unity than in preaching and protecting the doctrines of God's Word; isn't there a real difference between showing "deference" and tolerating false doctrine?

Both movements are suffering from their common heritage of pietistic pragmatism. Pietism tends to put religious feeling (heart) ahead of doctrinal truth (head). Pragmatism tends to evaluate everything by the standard of success—if it works it must be right. Pietism and pragmatism cannot effectively guide God's people. The short-term benefits of religious sentimentality and carnal success are always followed by long-term damage to the health of God's people.

To their shame and detriment, both pietism and pragmatism are uninterested in the kind of ministry Paul told Titus to establish on the island of Crete. If biblical Christianity is to flourish again in America, it will only happen if God's people return to faith in God's solutions for our problems—godly and gifted men with deep convictions about God's truth who will proclaim it accurately and authoritatively! Our desire at DBTS is to train men for that kind of ministry. May God help us to hold fast to the standard set forth in these verses, and may He cause those who are likeminded to flourish!