

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 3, Number 1 • Winter 1994

Ministering the Grace of God in Pastoral Care

A. Peter Parkinson

In recent years there has been an increasing trend for the pastor to perceive himself as having a twofold ministry and calling. First, to “preach the gospel,” and second, to function in the capacity of a “Christian counselor” specifically ministering to, or targeting, members of his flock perceived to have deep-seated emotional and personal problems. A plethora of books has emerged from the Christian and not-so-Christian press on the subject of “counseling,” some of considerable worth, and much of it of a questionable pedigree.

Identifying the true nature of pastoral ministry has been clouded by an unhelpful yet increasing tendency to distinguish between preaching and pastoral ministry. Statements such as, “Well, he is a great pastor but not a very good preacher,” or conversely, “He is a fine preacher, but you can’t really talk to him, for he is no pastor at all,” may frequently be heard in congregations. But here is either a fundamental misunderstanding of the true nature of the pastoral call on the part of the one making the observation, or a fatal flaw in the ministry of the pastor being cited. Such observations are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Doubtless the discernment of the “sheep” in our flocks making such observations is not entirely without credibility, and if this is the case, we may well have to conclude that neither category of person described is functioning in the pastoral role which the Scriptures prescribe.

However, there will doubtless be whiz kids who are both amazing preachers and sheer geniuses when it comes to the “counseling couch!” But if such a breed of “super pastor” really exists who can both preach, and at the same time has developed considerable counseling skills, can we assume that he will be functioning as a pastor should? In other words, what is the pastor’s mandate as prescribed in Scrip-

ture? How do we find a model upon which we who are pastors can fashion ourselves? How can we ascertain what are the true directives for, and constituent elements of, a biblical pastoral ministry which effectively labors in the grace of God? These are the fundamental questions I wish to address in my writing. We may go on to ask, that if (as for the most of us the case will be) we fall short of the super pastor standards previously described, can we nevertheless, with our severe limitations in both our preaching gifts and our counseling skills, still attain the standards which Scripture prescribes, and thus function adequately as pastors fulfilling our biblical mandate?

We need go no further in search of our model than to consider the pattern of Christ Jesus Himself. It would be inappropriate to look anywhere else. For the pastor is first and foremost a shepherd, an under shepherd to be more precise. Where else should we look for an example of perfect shepherding and pastoral care than to the "Good Shepherd" Himself, the one who is the "Chief Shepherd?" By considering the relationship and the nature of the human ministry which Jesus exercised toward His little ones, we will discover the requirement that must be made of any "under shepherd."

As soon as we begin the comparison, we will come up against enormous problems, for we discover that in Jesus' interactions with His fellow man, He functions on what seems to be a totally different plain than us. His understanding, His perception, His self control, His dignity, His great intellect, wit, and sheer incomparable grace, leave us reeling with a sense of hopeless inadequacy before a man whom we can never hope to emulate. Even our fictitious super pastors would be "left at the starting gate" in the presence of this man.

Some would insist that this great gulf exists because He is essentially so "wholly other," and that this "wholly other-

ness" exists because unlike us He is no ordinary man, for He is the God man. His possession of Godhood, His uniqueness, equips Him with graces and gifts which make His pastoral abilities unattainable to us mere mortals. It may seem, for instance, that His extraordinary knowledge of human beings is the direct consequence of His omniscience. God is omniscient; therefore as God, it would be argued, He must possess the incommunicable attribute of omniscience. Thus He must have limitless knowledge, and this omniscience enables Him to have complete knowledge of the mind, being, and circumstances of His fellow human beings.

Such a deduction is, I suggest, both wholly misguided and theologically unacceptable. For such reasoning would wreck beyond salvage the biblical doctrine of His "sympathetic priesthood." Moreover, such a notion of Christ Jesus would irreparably impugn the reality of His temptation, and, for that matter, of His sufferings. It would plunge us into an ultimate denial of the genuineness of His humanity. In a justifiable preoccupation with defending His deity, we may come, and without doubt have come, dangerously close to undermining the fullness of His humanity. For most certainly the human Jesus could well be, at best, "a little differently human" to us; at worst, He would be the possessor of a humanity almost "totally different" from ours.

We have to recognize that the tendency toward docetism is undeniably present in the emphasis of both the preaching and practice of evangelical Christianity. It may also be asked whether this emphasis has been the indirect cause for so much abuse of the pastoral office. The dehumanization of the pastoral ministry, too commonly reported, may well be a direct consequence of the dehumanization of the Chief Shepherd Himself!

We must assert that our "elder brother" truly shares in our humanity (Heb. 2:11,14), not a "special version" of our humanity, but our genuine true humanity lived out in all its

glories and with all its weaknesses. Unless we insist upon this assertion, then we do not have an elder brother at all, and we do not have anyone who can mediate for us as our representative (Heb. 4:15).

The question with which the pastor will be confronted, and potentially confounded, if we accept the true and full humanity of Jesus, is this: How do we explain the great gulf between us and our Chief Shepherd? If Jesus Christ shares the same humanity as us, why does He succeed in ministering on such a higher plain? Why are we so vastly inferior to Him in our shepherding ministry? What inhibits us from attaining the levels of perfection that He always attained, and still attains?

What prevents us understanding, sympathizing with, and perceiving the needs of others as Jesus does? What inhibits our discernment concerning the hearts and souls of our brethren? It is *not* our lack of "Godhood." No! It is nothing other than our own sinfulness. To put it another way, He, our elder brother, the Good Shepherd, is enabled to comprehend the needs of His flock, not by virtue of His Godhood, but by virtue of His having an infinitely more tender heart than ours. This tenderness may be perceived in two ways. First, in the perfection of His love for the Father, and second, in the perfection of His love for His sheep. In other words, His perfection in pastoring arises from nothing more than the perfection of His love. This love is the foundation upon which we must build any consideration of the role and function of pastoral ministry. Skills of counseling and eloquence in preaching are in fact irrelevant to the validity and true worth of our ministries as under shepherds. They are little more than window dressing. Faithful pastoral ministry will all come down to this one thing, conformity to Christ, i.e., Christlikeness. This may be summed up as "loving the Father as He loved the Father; loving His own (the sheep) as He loved His own."

The pastor who loves his flock will be the faithful pastor, the preacher who loves his people will be the effective preacher. He will be the acceptable minister, his will be an appropriate ministry, his will be both a Christ-honoring and member-edifying ministry of the Word of God.

Therefore, the foremost qualification for effective pastoral ministry is love. Love for the Father, love for the Good Shepherd, love for the sheep. In other words, "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts."

This does not mean that the psychologist or the therapist has no contribution to make in assisting us to understand and effectively help our people with their human problems and dilemmas. What it does mean is that the acquiring of knowledge, even knowledge wedded to considerable counseling expertise, will not *make* a pastor. It may make a good counselor or an effective Christian therapist, but that is not even the beginning of being an effective pastor. There may be a time when the sheep need the attention of a veterinarian. His skills may be called upon to assist in the diagnosis of a condition and in the prescription of a cure. Therefore, the responsible shepherd will not hesitate to call upon such an expert when skills different than, and beyond, his own are clearly needed. The shepherd will be thankful to have the skills of such a person to help him in the care of his beloved sheep, but the services of the "professional" will very quickly be dispensed with, and his presence will no longer be needed. Moreover, whatever the skills and abilities of the "called-in consultant," it will not be his voice whom the sheep will recognize, and not his presence which will inspire their confidence, and not his person whom they will follow, but that of their shepherd.

Where then do we turn to actually delineate this pastoral ministry in practical terms? Well, we must try to recapture the reality of the Jesus of history, the man Christ Jesus. The only place to go to discover Him is in the inspired pages of

Holy Scripture, and in particular in those all-too-neglected, yet truly remarkable, Gospel narratives. For here more than anywhere else the real Jesus springs to life from the sacred page, and the same Spirit who inspired the writers of the Gospels inspires the devoted and believing heart who searches the Word in search of the living Word.

Our task will be very simply to look at Christ Jesus. For Him to be our Pastor, our Good Pastor, it was necessary to become one with us, to become one of us. Only then could He sympathize with us, and understand us. To achieve this, God in Christ, as the late John Murray so wonderfully described, "Became what He eternally was not, whilst not ceasing to be what He eternally was" (from a sermon on Phil. 2).

He came onto our level as our Shepherd; He lived with us as one of us; He walked and talked with us; He became truly one of us, one with us. As Professor Donald Garlington once put it in a sermon describing the Good Shepherd, "He even came to smell like us." He came to imbibe every facet of true God-created humanity.

Lack of involvement, failure to identify with, or even an aloofness from the flock, are all an utter travesty of the pastoral call, yet probably one of the shortcomings most commonly complained about by our people. Time and again Christians observe, with some justification, how their pastors seem to function from their ivory towers of study and pulpit, and drift ever further away from the "real" world in which their members live day by day. The syndrome of the man who has gone from school to college to university to theological seminary through ordination into the pastoral ministry is not uncommon. It is surely not unreasonable to question the ability of such men to really understand the struggles and trials, problems and frustrations, of those who earn their living in frequently unattractive work places. It is not at all surprising that such pastors are often either hard pressed, or wholly unable to earn and retain the

respect and confidence of their flocks since they are worlds apart.

To pastor our people, or rather more correctly "His people," we must be one with them, one of them; we must walk with them, talk with them. We must meet the craftsman in his workplace to appreciate his work, and to appreciate him. We must know the doctor in his surgery or his hospital to comprehend his stress, we must discover the businessman in the hectic stressful life of commercial pressure, and be interested in hearing of the numerous crises that he continually faces, if we are going to meaningfully befriend him. We must encounter the mother in the inescapable toil of her home to understand her weariness. Kneeling, we must look into the eyes of the wheelchair-bound brother or sister, so that as they look down to us, we may engage in genuinely interested and compassionate conversation. We must stand by the open grave with our mourning brethren and do nothing more than just weep with them. We must stand before one of our beloved members, or maybe their children, found out in their grievous sinfulness, and as their blushing face of shame awaits our reproof or condemnation, with tear-filled eyes we must declare, "Neither do I condemn you!" When such a spirit becomes our pastoral clothing, then we shall begin to approach something of the nature and disposition of the Good Shepherd Himself. Then we shall begin to learn what biblical pastoral ministry in grace is all about. Here we are leaving behind the traditional stereotyped world of the counselor and the therapist, here we are entering into a wholly new and radically different dimension of human relationship and ministry which the "professional" knows little or nothing about. Here we are entering into that incredible dimension of ministry which might be described as Christ-like service, the under shepherding ministry of true humble service. We see something of this pattern in John 13:1-17 where our Savior dons

the humblest garb of all, and kneeling down before His beloved disciples, washes their feet.

Let us look a little more carefully at the life and ministry of Christ, and see whether these assertions we are making are indeed justified. We never find Him exercising the role of consultant to client, of doctor to patient. He is never the professional approaching his "case," but rather always the elder brother, the friend, the beloved one.

Perceive further that at no time do we find Jesus lording it over His flock. His relationship is one of service and ministry. He lives for them, His delight is to serve them, to care for them, to preserve them from danger and evil. His glorious high priestly prayer recorded in John 17 makes this overriding concern and compassion for His lambs unmistakably clear. We read in verse eleven, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name," and in verse fifteen, "My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the Evil One." So we could go on; the whole prayer overflows with expressions of love and compassion for His little ones. He pleads their cause at the Father's throne, and He pleads for them as His own, and as the Father's own. He identifies with them and stands undeniably and inseparably as "their man" and as "their elder brother." In His counseling, He is not unduly prescriptive, but explorative, letting them ask the questions. He even asks questions, and invariably He does not give plain answers, but rather demands that they discover for themselves the great and glorious truths of their relationship to Him, including the costs of discipleship.

One could not overestimate or exaggerate the value of simply going through the Gospels systematically to examine the way in which Jesus dealt with people on a pastoral level. Observe His relationship with them, theirs to Him; His response to them, theirs to Him; the way He addresses their problems, and the way He answers their questions. A brief

consideration of a selection of instances must suffice for us here, but a fuller analysis will provide the reader with ideal material for reflection and soul searching, and the ideal measure and example for us to follow.

We shall illustrate the pastoral ministry of Christ by simply citing six real life examples from the Gospel accounts.

First, consider His dealing with a woman found in gross immorality, whose condition is such that no pretense is possible, who finds herself inevitably judged by a "moral" community (John 8:1-11). The text gives us no intimation whatsoever that the woman is repentant. She is simply "caught" (vv. 3-4)! It is no surprise to us, and wasn't to the Jews of His time, that He did not commence to stone the woman. Indeed, that is why they had brought her to Him: they correctly anticipated His unwillingness to deal with her brutally. They had come to expect "mercy" to be that quality which this prophet would demonstrate when confronted by sinners. But what does come as a surprise is Jesus' words to the woman. For He who was and is "the Word made flesh," He who was the giver of the law, says to this woman who has so blatantly broken the law, "Neither do I condemn you." He does not simply offer forgiveness. What He does is more radical than this. He declares that He does not even "condemn" her. In no way does He acknowledge the acceptability of her sin, but what He appears to be stating is that He so understands the plight of her circumstances and her weakness of humanity, that He also understands why and how she has fallen into such a terrible condition. His final words are a glorious expression of hope, mercy and grace when He says, "No, go and leave your life of sin." Words pregnant with love, mercy, tenderness and understanding, and with extraordinary assurance and encouragement. She is dragged before Him as a whore, and she leaves as a lady! Dare any under shepherd show any less

mercy in the face of even the grossest sin? Does this man, our elder brother and our senior shepherd and minister, not make the most rigorous and radical demands upon our perception of what is appropriate, pastoral, and ethical conduct?

In today's climate of legalistic orthodoxy, it takes a courageous man to follow the Savior in such radical acceptance of sinners.

Second, let us consider Jesus' pastoral ministry in a completely different context. Consider how He handles being confronted by a repulsive and highly contagious physical disease. Reflect upon His response to a human being suffering from an illness from which any one would naturally recoil, and with which anyone would want to avoid physical contact. The disease is leprosy, and in particular I refer to the story of the leper in Matthew 8:1-4. The man is said to be in desperation, hoping intently and passionately for healing, when he comes and kneels before Jesus. He makes a sincere request, not doubting Jesus' ability, but questioning Jesus' willingness. He says: "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (v. 2)! The response of our Lord is glorious. He reaches out and touches the man (v. 3). The untouchable is touched. He breaks all the rules, He ignores the accepted and expected code of conduct for safe interaction with these people. For the first time since His illness commenced the man feels the touch of a non-leper. Think of this. And as He touches the man, Jesus utters these words: "I am willing." This is glorious. "I am willing!" These words are full of compassion and pity. The whole scene—the touch and the verbal response—is one of incredible tenderness, crowned with, "Be clean." You see, the accepted mode of social conduct is dispensed with, for the plight of the man is addressed. Jesus doesn't simply address the physical condition by healing. He meets the man as a person. The touch is all important, and in some senses

almost more important than the actual healing. For it is in the touch that the real depth of pastoral love and compassion is expressed, maybe even more than in the healing itself.

This unmistakable readiness to touch the untouchable, to initiate a physical contact with those whose condition or circumstances have rendered them "outcasts," rejected by respectable society, is the very action which Jesus demands of His shepherds. Here we find ourselves thrust into a most unwelcome and undesirable sphere of service. At this point we will find we have long ago lost the professionals, and with them most of the super pastors.

We may not be able to heal—that matters little, actually—but we can in our pastoral capacity "reach out and touch" those in need and pain. But it is not "the done thing" to touch untouchables, any more today than in the time of Jesus. But here is a biblical ministry of grace at work.

Third, reflect upon Jesus' response to an upstanding, well-respected member of society who makes what may have been a rather pretentious profession of intent (Matt. 8:19-20). A teacher of the law declares that he will "follow" Christ wherever He goes (v. 19). The hearers may have been impressed, and Jesus' reply is quite wonderful. He does not openly mock or demean the man. In fact, His answer achieves two totally different and remarkable effects. First, the on-looking bystanders hear a truly moving testimony to what obedience to God's call has cost Jesus. In other words they hear what discipleship means to the Savior (v. 20). "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." However, to the questioner, Jesus is saying something totally different. He is saying, "Are you really ready to follow Me everywhere? Now go and consider again whether you are truly ready and willing to be My disciple." There is tenderness here, there is remarkable perception and understanding of the man's

heart. Jesus on the one hand recognizes a genuine, though superficial, sincerity, and deals with him with great tenderness, and yet the man has the brutal and cutting reality of discipleship indelibly emblazoned onto his mind for ever. He can leave with dignity, and He knows what following this teacher will actually mean. Nevertheless, if he should decide to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, he will spend the rest of his whole life learning the cost of discipleship.

How easily and with what justification Jesus could have humiliated this man, exposing his ignorance and his shallowness, maybe even his insincerity. Yet it almost seems that Jesus hides the man's sin from others, while at the same time exposing his sin to the man himself. Here are kindness, discretion, gentleness and grace, but also inescapable truth shining with blinding clarity into the eyes of the man—the truth of his own sinfulness and of his unwillingness to really accept *the cost of discipleship*.

Fourth, consider the case of a very wealthy and well-behaved young man. He has a high opinion of himself, but he has a genuine spiritual interest and a real concern for the welfare of his soul. Mark's account is helpful (10:17-23). Here is a picture of an ardent and sincere young man, troubled in soul as he seeks to make his peace with God. In verse seventeen the picture of this meeting is set for us. The man runs to Christ, falls on his knees and addresses Jesus. His question reveals discernment but not faith: "Good teacher"—but not "Lord." Jesus even takes the innocence of his question and uses that as a means of revealing His true identity to this young man (v. 18). "Why do you call Me good? No one is good—except God alone." Here, if only the man would pause and think was Jesus' revelation of Himself. Then Jesus reels off the commands the man has kept and awaits the self-justifying response which still fails to bring the young man peace. Then Jesus next speaks with great compassion and earnestness. The text clearly ex-

presses the heart of our Lord when we read, "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (v. 21). He looked with love and tenderness on this troubled soul, and the heart of Jesus reaches out toward the lad. Jesus' answer is devastating. He places heaven within the man's grasp. He sees into his heart, and perceives that the real struggle is between his love for riches and his love for God. But just as tragically He sees that this is a young man utterly bereft of any real compassion for others and, in particular, wholly unconcerned with the plight of the many desperately poor people who thronged the streets of the city in which he lived in such opulence. In addressing the young man, Jesus comes straight to the one issue which will expose his greatest weakness, and the place where he is the most vulnerable. With devastating authority Jesus says, "One thing you lack. Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me" (v. 21). Jesus is literally saying to him, "Young man, I will gladly receive you, for I do most surely and truly love you; but you must be rid of the idolatry which your wealth has occasioned. That really must go. You see, for all your earnestness you neither love God nor your neighbor, so the law you so confidently claim to have kept, you have in fact broken at every point."

The young man was clearly devastated, but he would have a lifetime to contemplate the Savior's words. There was in Jesus' words truthfulness, yet tenderness. There is plainly no compromise with the truth, but just as plainly there is no hiding of love either. What a far cry this is from the appalling and wholly unjustified tendency of our generation in which the rich rarely hear forthright pastoral counsel, but rather flattering compliments from pastors fearful of having much-appreciated funds denied. There are few exceedingly rich and powerful people who have the grace to sit humbly under faithful pastoral ministry, and probably

far too few pastors who have either the conviction or the courage to speak the truth in love to such men.

Fifth, look at Jesus' response to blind Bartimaeus. Here was a poor and despised beggar, embarrassingly loud and coarse, enjoying the respect of few men and looked down on by all (Mark 10:46-52). Jesus is accompanied by large crowds, Bartimaeus has heard of Jesus' miracle-working abilities, and simply begins to shout at the top of his voice, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (v. 47). His screams are met with embarrassed and irritated rebukes from the crowd. Jesus' response is to stop and ask for him to be brought to Him (v. 49). The text throws us into the emotion and excitement of the occasion with the members of the crowd saying, "Cheer up! On your feet! He is calling you!" The whole encounter contains the inescapable feel that this man was a real character, and the people, in spite of being rather irritated by him, have some affection for him. Jesus' question is wonderful: "What do you want Me to do?" (v. 51). This man did not have one ounce of subtlety in his entire being. Jesus knew that, but He had compassion and love for him all the same. This was no blind man seeking spiritual blessing, or forgiveness for his sins. This was a blind man who just wanted to see. His response is great—"I want to see" (v. 51). Jesus simply heals him. "Go, your faith has healed you" (v. 52). Jesus shows to the crowd and to Bartimaeus that while there was little seeming spirituality in this man, yet there was faith. Faith in Jesus, and a faith to which Jesus responded. Love resulted in the man not only gaining his sight, but in following Jesus. Here we see the inescapable, no nonsense, response of compassion allied to intense humanity.

Let our final illustration come from Luke 7:36-50. Here we have the account of the woman anointing Jesus' feet. We know from the story that this woman was a sinful woman (v.37). He puts it like this: "When a woman who had lived a

sinful life. . . ." Whatever her past, the fact is, she loved Jesus with a pure love, and she loved Him with all her heart. But she chooses the most inappropriate way imaginable to express her love. The scene can easily be pictured: Jesus reclining at the table, the woman making a spectacle of herself, and the respectable Pharisee and his guests bewildered and most profoundly embarrassed, not knowing where to run their eyes. They were totally confused by Jesus allowing this very sensual and intimate act of affection to take place at all. The Pharisee said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (7:39).

Jesus addresses this man very directly, and strongly. He relates a story of two men with debts to pay to a moneylender. Both have their debts forgiven. One had a rather small debt, the other a huge one. Jesus then asks, "Now which of them will love him [the moneylender] more?" (v.42). When the answer is "the one who had the bigger debt" (v. 43), Jesus turns toward the woman and commends her actions, including the emotional and public displays of affection that she has just shown. He adds, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (v. 47).

This is amazing, for in that statement He cuts right through the act, and addresses the intent. Moreover He draws attention to the incredible, unperceived significance of the act. He treats her with appreciation, with dignity, with affection and with the greatest honor, and unashamedly defends her from those who would criticize her.

Further examination of encounter after encounter will reveal yet more of this extraordinary person. Jesus is a man of compassion, of tenderness, of mercy, of kindness, of gentleness, of grace. His very actions and attitudes define grace! He is one who seems at times almost blind to the

failings and inconsistencies of some of the weak souls to whom He ministered. Here is one who can see holiness in a whore, truthfulness in a thief, His heavenly Father's image in even the worst of sinners, and He clearly sees all men as His brethren.

How then do we transpose the reality of the Good Shepherd that we find in the Gospel narratives, to the pastoral office which we strive to fulfill so inadequately in our day?

The pastor must first be a servant of Christ and a servant of Christ's flock. The church doesn't exist for the minister or to serve the pastor and his office; rather the pastor exists to serve the church. The church does not belong to the pastor, the church belongs to Christ. The pastor is the *under shepherd*. As such we must say, woe to those pastors who exploit, or who without due honor for the flock; lord it over the lambs of Christ. It is not right for any under shepherd to ever deal more severely with any child of God than the Chief Shepherd would deal.

If a pastor must fall into error, let him err on the side of meekness rather than of exaltation of his office. Let him err on the side of humility rather than pride, of forgiveness rather than judgment, of patience rather than swift action, of blindness to faults rather than a preoccupation with discovering and exposing wrongs within the flock of Christ.

Pastoral ministry should have as its chief objective the encouragement and sustenance of the flock of Christ. The pastor who fails to encourage and sustain has failed in the very fundamental function of his call. The man who succeeds in discouraging or disillusioning the flock of Christ has aptly qualified for the post of "hired hand" (John 10:13), an all-too-common phenomenon for our churches to tolerate.

That which drives the pastor to be a true pastor should above all else be love. All pastoral counsel should be given in love and out of love for the person being helped.

In the counseling ministry the under shepherd must bear one vital truth in his mind: He has no right to intrude into the life, mind or soul of any member of his flock, unless he is requested to do so through advice or personal help. And even when he is asked for counsel, he must exercise the greatest care and treat his flock with the greatest honor and respect in this regard. It is not always helpful to encourage God's people to "tell all" to their pastor, even in confidence. The only person who our flock should ultimately be encouraged to trust with their deepest and innermost feelings and thoughts is the Good Shepherd Himself. We do a great disservice to our people when we encourage them to drop their guard and trust us without reserve. We do them the greatest service when we point them to Christ and encourage them to find in Him alone their all-sufficient counselor and shepherd.

There is evident in the pastoral ministry of Jesus a vital two-fold element. First, in dealing with others He was always completely and intensely human. He was disarmingly approachable, clearly unthreatening and indisputably affectionate. Second, in His relationship with others He clearly regarded everyone as His fellow human being, His brother, the bearer of the image of His Father in heaven, the object of His Father's love, and, as such, each person was a being who deserved to be treated with the utmost dignity and respect by virtue of his God-createdness. All were His brethren in this significant sense. This humanity must be the hallmark of any faithful pastoral ministry carried out in the grace of Christ the Savior. This humanity is, indeed, *the* hallmark of a biblical pastoral ministry.

In the preaching ministry the pastor should have as his great driving force his love for God and his love for the people to whom God has called him to minister. Love will demand that he prepare laboriously week after week; love will drive him on through all the discouragements; love will

make sure that his reproofs, his corrections, encouragements and his pleadings, are all done in the spirit of meekness and gentleness. And when all is said and done, love will ensure that Christ Jesus Himself will be the chief and final end of his preaching ministry.

The pastor must watch and guard his own heart. How easily he can exploit his flock for his own ends, create dependence for the bolstering of his own ego, or build up his own confidence through the church.

There is one sure way for the under shepherd to guard his soul, and ensure that he functions as Christ Jesus would have him to do. That is very simply to ensure that his daily walk of faith keeps him in the closest proximity to Christ Himself. Such a walk is facilitated as every pastor knows, or will soon come to know, by a daily life of prayer and meditation, a constant and daily contemplation of Scripture, but particularly a constant immersion of mind and soul in those Gospel narratives which reveal Jesus to us. This is a daily acquaintance and encounter with the reality of the historical Jesus Himself. Only then shall we never fail to show mercy and kindness where He would show such grace, that we never withhold forgiveness from those He would gladly forgive.

The beginning and the end of the pastoral vocation is this: to know Christ Jesus, and in knowing Him to then strive with all our being to be like Him; and in striving to be like Him, to love Him; and in loving Him to love those whom He has entrusted to our care.

Author

A. Peter Parkinson serves as pastor of Leeds Reformed Baptist Church, Leeds, England. He is director of the ministry Caring for Life, which is a work of compassion and care for young people.
