

Encourage Leaders to Focus on Real Ministry

Scripture

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” (1 Peter 5:1-4 NKJV)

Thesis

Leaders need to be encouraged to do real biblical ministry.

Commentary

I recently read a document dating back to 1647 (<http://www.reformed.org/ecclesiology/index.html>) that dealt with the subject of family worship. What amazed me about this document was the accountability the people had to the Church, and the apparent influence the Church had over individuals.

The church is far removed from this authoritative position today. In many cases, the church does not even concern itself with the individual other than preaching sermons on Sunday morning. Most attempts by brave leaders to exercise some accountability fail because the leadership structure itself is not accountable to the eldership. However, this does not remove the elders' accountability before God.

Let's briefly look at that responsibility: willing honest and humble, oversight. Elders are to have oversight, yet how many even know what is happening in the homes of their members. How can you oversee something of which you never take account?

Why has the church lost its connection with the family? The answer to that question is very complicated, but part of the answer is found in the professional ministry.

A short disclaimer is appropriate here. The purpose of this writing is to challenge you to pray and encourage your pastor to do the work God has called him to do with an emphasis on prayer. It is not to cause you to grumble against or to become disenchanted with your pastor. With that in mind, let me describe what some pastors are facing.

Congregations unwittingly evaluate a ministry's success by the number of people that sit in the pew each week or by the number of confessions made. This in turn puts pressure on the pastor to ensure that those numbers increase or at least remain steady. This makes his job burdensome because he has no power over people only God does. Now he is ministering out of compulsion and not willingly. This leads an unhealthy concern for his security. His wages, which care for his family, are at risk. Now he is tempted to minister for dishonest gain instead of ministering eagerly. The end of this cycle leads him to lord it over the people so that he can manipulate them for his purposes and not God's. Of course all of this demands that he ruffle no feathers which real accountability will do. Therefore, everything is dealt

with externally and very little real ministry takes place, and discipline is almost impossible even in the worst case of sin.

How can you help? Pray for your pastor regularly that he will do the job God has called him to do. Also, pray that he will see what his job is. Additionally, stop encouraging the use of a false standard. Measure success by whether the Word of God is being proclaimed accurately, if families are being held accountable, and if parents are raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, etc.

The men who lead our churches need courage to do the right thing. Let them know that you are willing to stand behind them. Most pastors want to do what is honoring to the Lord so have patience. God can do beyond what we can imagine.

Prayer

Dear God in heaven, we confess our foolishness before you. Remind us daily what is important. Keep us focused on real ministry, and not the numbers game. Our pastors are bombarded weekly with this program and that tactic all telling them how to build their churches numerically. Lord, you have said narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. We desire that many come to know you Lord, but keep us from allowing that desire to lead us astray. All of our labors are in vain if you do not build the church. Please, Father, put it in the hearts of your leaders to risk all for your sake and the gospel, amen.