

Tonight's sermon is all about me. I am sure this is your very favorite topic. Now, I am not going to tell you a bunch of stories about my life. That's not what preaching is for. And frankly, I am not that interesting.

I entitled the sermon, *Those Who Labor in Preaching*. This is Paul's wording from our text from 1 Timothy. And that's what I do. That's *the most important thing* that I do in the life of the Church—alongside the administration of the Sacraments—and prayer.

We see this as early as Acts 6, as the Apostles say, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” I say this again and again. Word and Sacrament ministry should be the focus of my time. It is what you want me to be doing.

I saw this headline from *The Babylon Bee* last week. It's satire, of course. They are trying to be funny. The headline goes like this. *Pastor Psyches Himself Up For Another Grueling One-Day Work Week*.

The *article* says, “Pastor Harrison Fletcher of Redeemer Church was seen preparing to hunker down in his study, in accordance with his weekly habit of mentally and physically preparing himself to withstand the onslaught of his single day of work.

“People close to Fletcher continued to be amazed at how much he managed to do each week. ‘I don't know how he does it,’ one source confessed. ‘Week in, week out, he shows up for an entire day to put in the work. Well, not an entire day, but you know what I mean. At least a good three or four hours during the first half of the day. But just think of the mental toughness that's required to pull that off. Some guys even do this for decades. Can you imagine that?’

“At publishing time, Pastor Fletcher had reportedly decided to put in a little extra effort this week by starting to prepare his sermon on Saturday night.”

Now, I hope by now you know it doesn't really work like that. I won't make a big defense for how I handle my schedule. But I think Paul expects a little more from pastors.

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about Timothy leaving an example of life for his congregation to follow, “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” And he was supposed to spend his time in the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching.

And of course, we can think of Paul's life. Pastors are to follow his example. And Paul gave his life away for the cause of the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians 11, He talks about his own “toil and hardship.” And after a list of his sufferings and difficulties, he adds, “there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

We have seen hints of this throughout this book. The Pastoral Epistles—1&2 Timothy and Titus—read something like a book of Church order. In fact, the heading in the ESV for chapter five is named, *Instructions for the Church*. And there is a great deal of content about the role of elders.

Now, the terminology is a little tricky. When we say *elders*, we think of our Board of Elders. And truly—of all our boards—they are given the responsibility for spiritual care. Their role is to come alongside the pastor. In Scripture, however, they are more like the *deacons* of chapter three. They are servants of the congregation. We covered this ground a few weeks ago.

The *elders* mentioned at the beginning of our reading are called and ordained *pastors*. There is just one necessary Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament—even as the titles vary—elders, overseers, bishops, shepherds, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

The Augsburg Confession says this, “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.”

And then it says, “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.”

Here in our reading, the instructions for the Church regarding the Office fall into three categories. First, remuneration, or how pastors should be honored and paid. Second, accusation—or how and when pastors may be disciplined. And finally, ordination—or how men may qualify to serve in this office in the first place. Let’s handle them in reverse order.

We talked a lot about the qualifications for pastors several weeks ago with Pastor Batchelor. The office is limited to well-qualified men. They don’t put themselves forward—they are sent and prepared and placed by the Church. This is the point of ordination. The Church appoints. The individual candidate is subject to the Church’s testing and blessing. This is a real problem for those pastors who are just self-labeled pastors—and for congregations which have no standards—no proper measure of confessional faithfulness.

Paul gives shape to a rightly ordered call in Romans 10. And notice the centrality of preaching for the pastoral ministry, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

And the qualifications for the ministry are carefully assessed. It is as Paul says back in chapter three. He must be “above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well. He must not be a recent convert.”

Now, even with all of this careful attention and preparation, things can go wrong. Pastors are sinners too. This is why I face the altar for confession of sins—and even for the words of institution. I need what we all receive here—forgiveness, life, and salvation. My life gets corrected by God’s Word—just like yours. I live by the grace of God—just like you.

Now, remember that Paul is writing to Timothy about his Church in Ephesus. And he addresses particular problems. And there does seem to be a problem with pastors who are not conducting themselves well. There is a subtle hint at the very beginning of our reading. He says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

This suggests that some are ruling well, and some are not. But evidence is important. The Church is not to entertain the accusations of one angry member. There is an old saying. If one comes to see you—he has a problem. If two come to see you—you have a problem. Here, two or three witnesses are required before an accusation can even be entertained against a pastor.

Don't believe every piece of gossip you might hear about me. And I'll do the same for you. But there are specific instructions about how to handle a grievance against a pastor here. And when there is a real public scandal—and we have seen too many on the news—pastors are to be rebuked publicly. And when a pastor disqualifies himself from the ministry—we need to have the spiritual oversight to handle it.

I like the way St. John Chrysostom says it, “For as it is wrong to condemn hastily and rashly—so *not to punish* manifest offenses is to open the way to others, and embolden them to offend...For it is a much greater scandal, that the offense should be known, and not the punishment. For as when sinners go unpunished, many commit crimes; so when they are punished, many are made better.”

Public rebuke is just necessary sometimes. But it should be a last resort—even with pastors. It is a safe rule that private sins should be dealt with privately—and only public sins publicly. And it is neither right nor necessary to make what is private *public* until all other possibilities have been exhausted.

Christians must care enough to confront sin in all its forms. Church discipline is just necessary sometimes—even for pastors. And certainly, this pertains to the moral life. I should guard my life closely. But even more importantly—this pertains to my theological life.

It is my teaching that is central to my faithfulness to the Church—and to Christ. False doctrine is what divides the Church—and leads people astray. We want our pastors to be well-trained. We should encourage ongoing training. Faithfulness to the Scriptures—and sound theology—is faithfulness to Christ. The congregation really needs the pastor to be submitted to the Scriptures—and to Christ.

Now, talking about my paycheck is not my favorite conversation. I won't spend too much time here on these comments. The Board of Elders traditionally kicks me out of the room for paycheck discussions. The district has guidelines for such things anyway.

Paul's quotation from Deuteronomy 25 is not the most flattering. But it gets us where we need to be. “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” The basic idea here is that if the pastor is adequately paid—this is part of honoring the Office. And he will not be distracted by worldly cares. I do appreciate the way the Synod is caring for young pastors especially—doing our best to keep them out of debt. This allows pastors to focus properly—on directing the affairs of the Church well.

Let me make one final comment on verse 23. Paul says to Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” The denomination of my youth was highly influenced by the temperance movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. For them, any alcohol was a sin—even though Paul clearly allows it for Timothy right in this passage.

There are clearly dangers in excess drinking. The instructions for both elders and deacons include warnings against drunkenness and addiction. Paul extends that to every Christian in Ephesians 5. He says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”

But Paul not only allows Timothy to take a little wine for reasons of health—but commands him to do so. Paul has no time for legalism. And he expects Timothy to take care of himself—mind, body, and soul. Then, picking up the matter of sin, private and public once more, Paul makes the case that sooner or later—both sins and good works—will become public. And so, a pastor should manage his whole life well.

My application for this passage is to recognize the value of the Office of the Ministry. This is the way Christ chose to establish His Church and the kingdom of God on earth. The man himself is replaceable. I won’t be the last pastor at St. John—unless the Lord comes back.

And you may not always see eye to eye with the pastor. I know I don’t. But the Office of the Ministry is irreplaceable. It deserves double honor as Paul says here. Luther even lists it as one of the marks of the Church. A Church needs a pastor. And Christians need to submit to the Office.

And of all the denominations out there today, we do the very best job of preparing our pastors. We do the very best of holding them accountable. I think we even do the very best at valuing and respecting the Office of the Ministry.

I hope you can look beyond the man, and see God’s hand at work. Listen to sound instruction. And finally, live in the forgiveness of sins that the pastor delivers. This is good Church order. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+