

BILL ANDERSON
MINISTRIES

EVERY PASTOR'S **TWO MENTORS**

WHO WILL PASTOR THE PASTOR?

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the thousands of Christian men and women---friends in time and eternity---who have formed the various congregations which it has been my immeasurable privilege to shepherd, and, especially, to a true friend and yoke-fellow in Christ

Edmund Richardson Yates

a “layman” *par excellence* who has not only exhibited the living Christ operating in his own life, but has also manifested a life-long passion to disciple others in Christ, and who, unrelentingly, nudged me to write this book.

EVERY PASTOR'S TWO MENTORS

Every wise pastor possesses an acquisitional brain; he peruses and ponders a vast “literature” with a keen avidity--books, people, situations, history, nature, his own heart. He never ceases to learn. He, like all wise men, is interested in every aspect of the boundless infinitude of his universe. Although he realizes he can never know more than an iota of its truth, he never loses his fascination with it; God has not, and he must not! In the nature of the case, all who teach him are his mentors. *That word and its place in the lives of pastors is the focus of this book, as we put two such helpers under our microscope, both of whom will be of immeasurable assistance to us in our strategic work.*

Mentors? The word has re-popularized itself recently, as it has intermittently throughout history, and is a modern buzz-word in western civilization. It comes from a Greek mythological figure, Mentor, who served as a teacher / guide / counselor to Telemachus, a son of the famed Odysseus. It is no exaggeration, however, to say that one person teaching another person dates back to Eden. Nor is exaggeration to say that we can expect the same until the final day of human history since the use of language is that act which most distinguishes us from all other forms of life. *In reality, all of us are mentors and mentorees.*

In the past week, without any specific search for references to mentoring, I saw a television special on the subject relative to the workplace, observed a plaque in a restaurant indicating it had been awarded the “Mentoring Award” (whatever that might mean) in a recent year, was served in another restaurant by a young woman with a trainee at her heels, watched a guy friend of mine mentor two women about a “new and better” way to make pancakes, and observed a lot of ink on sports pages on coaching and coaching changes---coaching being one of the most obviously pure mentoring vocations. Then, this morning, I saw a television clip of a woman being mentored as a stonemason at the famed Cornwall Castle in Denmark, the first woman stonemason in Danish history!

Mentors: we need them all, but wise men choose with special care those whose wisdom is markedly more helpful to us than others. It is better to have a few excellent ones than a thousand mediocre ones. In the mentoring arena, the adage is always true: less is more. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, arguably the most notable of all English-speaking pastors, often said, “Beware the man of one book!” In saying that, he was not being dismissive of reading; he was himself a voracious reader, going through four or five books every week for years. His “one book” was, of course, the Bible, which he saw as his basic textbook. He had observed the power of its words, allowing it to supercede the power of any other book on the planet.

President James Garfield, speaking to the alumni of Williams College in New York, said of its president,

Mark Hopkins :

I am not willing that this discussion should close without mention of a true teacher. Give me a log hut, with only a simple bench, Mark Hopkins on one end and I on the other, and you may have all the buildings, apparatus and libraries without him. (1)

A footnote to the statement is added by the man of letters Arthur Guiterman:

For Education is, Making Men;
So it is now, so was it when
Mark Hopkins sat on one end of a log
And James Garfield sat on the other. (*Ibid.*)

In the light of the multitude of teachers/advisers modern pastors have--stretching back to the very dawn of Christian pastoral history---it must strike one as bordering on the absurd to speak of "Every Pastor's Two Mentors." That would, however, only be true if what Garfield and Guiterman said was not true!

The thesis of this book is that of the pastor's innumerable counselors, two exist, the first being absolutely necessary, and the other, while not absolutely necessary, is yet, in a unique way, helpful. Absent the first one, the pastor is totally inept for his task; absent the second the pastor has missed a "Mark Hopkins" kind of man. I have chosen the word "uniquely" carefully, for reasons which I hope will be clear later. Hearing and heeding them both will do much to prepare the modern pastor---and all others in ministerial callings---for their strategic work throughout the duration of the work of the Christian ministry.

I believe, further, that the essential features of the mentoring of those two teachers are stated---either explicitly or implicitly---in the twenty-five verses that comprise the twenty-first chapter of the Fourth Gospel, that of the apostle John. R. V. G. Tasker says of this passage: "*Few passages in the New Testament have a more numinous quality, or are so haunting in their beauty; and there can be few readers who remain insensitive to the awe and mystery which pervade it.*" (2) We will see in our study of the text that Tasker's words are peculiarly fitting: "haunting," "awe," "mystery," and "pervade" all evoke strong images, but particularly is that true of his "numinous"---which is not only technically apt, but charming as well. It speaks of a *presence* which is of a mystical and unearthly quality, felt but not seen. It is often contrasted with "phenomenal," i.e., that which is material and therefore observable. Let the reader begin his study with a special sensitivity to Tasker's description of John's reportage. Among other things, it will prevent anyone from ever "closing the book" on the full meaning of the passage of our focus.

The idea that the passage is peculiarly instructive for pastors had never before occurred to me until recently as I pored over it. It has always been a treasure to me, but I had never seen it in that particular light. A helpful perspective is to see the aforementioned "literature" of the world as the pastor's entire library, the Bible as the one book which is the *crème de la crème* of that vast library, and our twenty-five verses as being, perhaps, the quintessence of biblical material relative to the pastoral task. That, let it be explicitly stated, in no way

is a denial of the need for the pastor to spend his life studying the entire Bible. *If the marrow of our spiritual bones is not saturated with the very words of scripture, we shall infallibly spend our lives tilting at windmills. Infallibly!* The Holy Spirit speaks the language of scripture, and whatever we hear from Him, either objectively or subjectively, will always square with the words He caused the biblical authors to write. The enemy fears no other book as he fears the Bible. Again, all who work this mother lode of truth will find that it can never lose its blessings for the pastor who is beginning his ministry journey or the one who is nearing the end of that work.

If we are not functioning in the power of the ministry truths of this passage, regardless of how many other mentors we have access to, we are at risk of traveling fatal detours experienced by so many pastors. Those detours result in the loss of the pleasure and blessing of God, an inability to help a desperately needy world, the lessening of our ability to lead God's people effectively, resulting in the absence of the esteem of the people of God and failure to achieve any sense of our own personal fulfillment in response to God's call to be a shepherd of His people. Whether we receive the truths revealed from that passage or elsewhere, they represent the "base line" of all ministry, and for the pastoral ministry in particular. *That is to say nothing of another crucial matter: if we miss the Tiberias truths (the geographical location of our scriptural focus), and thereby fail to live out the original intent of God for the pastoral ministry, we will prove unfit as mentors to new generations of pastors to come. Heaven's economy is based on the principle of the apostolic axiom: "Such as I have give I unto thee"? We do not, after all, always consciously choose to mentor others; it occurs automatically, whether we are aware of our imitators or not.*

One may well have had a lifetime of successful pastoral ministry without ever seeing this passage in such a light, but a careful study of it will reap for him a rich harvest. *It portrays Christ personally mentoring and sending forth His first pastor, and is therefore a seminal event for all succeeding pastors.* Further, the passage forever serves aptly as a test of the *legitimacy* of one's pastoral ministry.

Pastoral methodologies change with the changing culture, but it is essential that we do not alter the fundamental characteristics of the vocation. God has written no codicil to the New Testament. Obviously, no two men ever have or ever will shepherd God's people in precisely the same manner, but---throughout the centuries---certain biblical principles have patently manifested themselves in all godly pastors. It will be observed, as well, that in all genuine Christian ministry in general, not alone the pastorate, such principles will operate to one extent or the other, and thus, all servants of our Lord will benefit substantively by pondering the passage of our focus. There is here no plea for any exceptionalism for the pastor; all God's children are called on to manifest the godly graces expressed here.

The entire biblical revelation represents the school of ministry for every believer for the length of his days "that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work," (II Timothy 3:17) but more particularly is that true for the shepherd, which is the context of the passage. Woe be to the pastor, not to mention his congregation, if he forsakes his Bible, the eternal standard for pastoral work! "Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things

new and old.” (Matthew 13:52) A woman walked out of a large church, in my student days, and was heard to say: “It is truly difficult to believe that God gave us 1500 pages of inspired scripture and the pastor could not find anything on any of those pages worth sharing with us this morning!”

This book is a plea for every pastor to be enriched by the intentional and intensive study of the passage of focus, and to be prepared to discover rich insights, whether a pastoral neophyte or veteran.

FOREWARD

I do not for a moment believe that the call of God for a man to pastor His people represents the highest of callings, but I do believe it is a truly fascinating one, perhaps vastly more significant than we have commonly thought, and that---in any and every case---the man so called is a highly favored man. Every minister must rejoice in his own calling. “I magnify *my* ministry,” says a man who was never called a pastor, though he often performed pastoral tasks. He was, he said, “the apostle to the gentiles” but his autobiographical statement resonates in all God-called Christians---that is, to know and pursue energetically, his own personal calling and assignment. The purpose of this book, however, is to focus specifically on God’s shepherds, the pastors of His flock, *on the man himself*, and on the essential nature and practice of his task.

I say “essential” because my intention is not to address the many and varied pastoral tasks relating to church growth, church leadership, church administration, church staff leadership, church finances, church building programs, or anything else of that sort. Each of those subjects, and many more akin to them, are constantly on the heart and mind of every truly God-called man, as well they should be. A pastoral friend was driving along one day murmuring to the Lord that he had just spent part of a valuable morning dealing with a general contractor about the quality and amount of cement required in a building his church was planning. He told me that, as he drove along, the Lord broke into his soliloquy and asked him, “Is the building My business or is it not My business?” He said, “Well, sure, Lord; it’s Your deal, not mine.” “Well and good,” said the Lord, “then pay attention to the concrete.” With that caveat confessed, it is the man himself, and not what he does, which is the focus of our study. E. M. Bounds speaks to the central issue:

We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the Gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God’s plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God’s method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better Men. (3)

Scotland’s famed historian, Thomas Carlyle, espoused the theory of “heroistic individuals” as the central theme of world history. The human story, he said, is the story of individuals, people of unusual vision and energy and vitality, who originated or led movements which altered the course of history. To what extent that thesis is true is debatable, but this is not: “Men are God’s methods,” as Bounds said. God’s business in

the pastor-building business is not to make a sermon or an orator to deliver it; it is, rather, to make a man and deliver that! Surely, what a man is makes a crucial difference in many vocations, but it could be argued cogently that in no other calling is that issue more determinative than the Christian ministry.

Thus, our specific aim has to do with a study of the pastor himself, his character, his core values--- the pastor as a Christian, the man as he is on the inside, not the outside, the man God sees and not the man others see. A pastor, before, during, and after he is a pastor, is a follower of Christ, that and nothing more or less. And since every act of a man's life is autobiographical, it is absolutely mandatory that he is possessed by certain unalterable values in the depths of his inmost being before he attempts to lead anybody else into truth. It is impossible to overstate the significance of that issue. To go astray there is to guarantee failure. To fail is not to be a failure, but to fail has its inevitable price. We all must, finally, sit down to a table of consequences.

Why is that true? Consider one of many reasons: if it cannot be proven now, it may well be obvious when time becomes eternity, that the men most responsible, directly, for the moral and ethical and spiritual welfare of a culture are the pastors of local flocks of Christians. The church is to be, must be, the moral conscience and compass of the culture. If not upon her, upon whom does that duty fall? If it sounds like overstatement to maintain that “as goes the pulpit, so goes the culture,” it is God Himself who must be charged with the exaggeration. He makes that specific claim in Jeremiah’s twenty-third chapter, a passage which is another mother-lode of truth to all who enter the work of the pastorate, especially as to pastoral influence on the culture. It is pre-eminently the pastoral chapter in the entire Old Testament.

The chapter is directed, specifically, to “shepherds” (used three times), “priests” (used three times) and “prophets” (used 19 times), and they, the spiritual leaders of the nation, are charged with being the essential and central cause of the moral decadence of the entire nation! Hear how their failure degraded the culture: the sheep (meaning all Israel) are scattered (vs 2), they have been driven away (vs 2), they land has been cursed by their egregious failure (vs 10), the place of worship has been polluted and defiled (vs 11), they have “prophesied in Baal” and have caused the people to err (i.e., to go astray in sin, vs 13), the hands of evildoers have been strengthened (vs 14), “profaneness has gone out into the land,” (vs 15), Israel is instructed to refuse to listen to such spiritual leaders (vs 16), the spiritual leaders “make you---the nation---worthless,” (vs 16), they “try to make My people forget My name,” (vs 27), again, they “cause my people to err,” (vs 32), they are no “profit” to God’s people, (vs 32), and the final result of their failure as spiritual leaders is that their preaching can no longer be trusted; the people have no fountain of truth since God’s true oracles are no longer heard as a result of the arrant disobedience to God (vss 33-39). *The passage is a veritable compendium of evidences of cultural decadence produced by the failure of spiritual leaders.* It is entirely possible, one must remember, that many such men may well have believed they were doing God a favor in their privileged roles among His people, and that they would have been shocked to have had their abysmal failure shown to them.

One author makes the following comment on the passage:

National disasters have spiritual causes, and the chief weight of blame rests on spiritual misleaders. This

verse (11) shows that the foregoing complaint is not just the general immorality but specifically of the unclean lives of religious professionals. The effect (vs 14) of immorality in religious high places is that it strengthens the forces of moral laxity throughout the entire nation until the city of God epitomizes the state of *Sodom*. (4)

One needs no modern survey to verify the truth of God that entire nations can be ruined by the failure of men of God to live up to their calling. If logic did not demand it, the Bible explicitly states it. Consider the matter from a positive perspective: who can calculate the collective redemptive influence of America's estimated 400,000 pastors---not to mention millions of other Christian teachers, church and denominational leaders---were we all walking in love for the Saviour and giving our lives away in behalf of His sheep?

To say that, however, is not to forget that the faithfulness of the individual shepherd must not be based on what others do or not do: it is based on his own personal call by Christ, and his faithfulness to that assignment. *Every man must be ready to go it alone.* "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.'" (Colossians 4:17, emphasis added) As spiritual leaders, en masse, have such a palpable influence on the culture, so does the pastor on his own local assembly of believers, which is why local churches are so pained over pastoral failures. The glee with which such failures are trumpeted by secularists is actually a "left-handed" compliment; more is expected of us, as well it should be. Let every man who enters the ministry of the gospel, therefore, understand the power of his influence, both for good and evil, and be aware of the inevitable day of accountability when he must render to the Lord a true report as to his own personal faithfulness to his task. And let him do so early on, and decisively. A current media debate questions as to whether or not professional athletes are role models. The biblical position is that every one who names the name of Christ is a role model, regardless of his or her opinion about the matter and *will give answer for the stewardship of their influence.* Let the pastor be warned: that is true, in a heightened sense, of all who lead His people. One of the most striking strangenesses of human existence is that one man says "No man lives wholly for God; why should I?" and another says "No man lives wholly for God; I want to be one of the few who do."

In the natural course of things, therefore, "as goes the pulpit, so goes the church, and so goes the culture." It must be obvious to the most casual observer that a church tends to take on the personality of its pastor; in fact, in time, will almost precisely mirror his personality.

Researchers are finding valid connections between the health of the personalities of corporate executives and the health of their organizations. Leaders, like everyone else, are driven by aspirations, fears and fantasies. These forces in a leader's personality can be very powerful, and when they are neurotic, chances are the organization will be so as well. (5)

That is not to denigrate, again, any other true calling from God, nor to deny the redemptive influence of every legitimate Christian ministry; it is to explicitly state---for all the obvious reasons---that the moral condition of a church and, ultimately, a culture, follows the trajectory of the state of its pulpits.

I say “for all the obvious reasons.” If we admit that humanity is in need of moral instruction, of a recognition of---and a response to---a moral transcendence, of a continual re-clarification of values (both positive and negative), of a cosmic mooring amid the shifting sands of the ever-changing worldviews, then the question becomes, “Who is it who will, as Bonhoeffer asked, ‘speak of the final issues’ if not the pastor?”

John Ruskin, English essayist, knew something of the significance of the pastoral role. He wrote, almost exactly 150 years ago, that there are five “great intellectual professions relating to the necessities of life” and that three of them “exist necessarily.” The three? They are, said Ruskin, the pastor who teaches the citizens, the physician who keeps them in health, and the merchant who provides for their needs. Each of these must, if needs be, says Ruskin, literally die for his cause and his country in the process. In the case of the pastor, he must die “rather than teach falsehood.” (6) If modern Christian leaders deem that Ruskin overstated the case, let them admit that the hard facts of history prove him right.

The simplest church service in a seemingly insignificant setting is, although counter-intuitive to modern men, in reality an astonishing scene: people of all sorts and kinds have gathered together and sit before a man with a book in his hands for the express purpose of thinking together about the eternal issues, the ultimate questions, the true and final realities of human existence. Who else is it, where else is it, when else is it, in the concourse of human experience, that such a thing happens? All will admit that such scenes are all too often marked by a cascade of platitudes pouring forth from a jaded pulpit over the heads of a sleepy congregation, followed by---as Mark Twain once said about a lazy Sunday noontime---the town clock striking twelve and the church giving up its dead. That is reminiscent of a diary-entry of Robert Louis Stevenson: “Went to church today; was not greatly depressed.” Yes, yes, of course, that happens. But that is a wretched caricature of what God intended, and it is also a wretched lie that it always, or almost always, accurately describes what happens on Sunday mornings. Add to that this shocker: God has been known to lay His benevolent ambush for some unsuspecting soul in such settings, to radically invade a man’s life, and to redeem it for eternity, through a shop-worn platitude spoken by a half-asleep pulpитеr to a dozing congregation.

The proper question, however, is this: what about the other end of the spectrum, that setting in which the people of God gather in joyous expectancy to hear a word from God through a man, clothed in the power of a fresh anointing from God, thrilled with the evangel, prepared by serious prayer and study, who experiences the joy of shared discovery by giving forth the riches of God’s living word? A true shepherd standing before his assigned flock, be it little or large, educated or uneducated, refined or rustic, giving forth---out of his own intimate converse with the great God Almighty---that, I say, serves as an excellent opportunity for one of Soren Kierkegaard’s “Either/or” moments, i.e., that instant when a man may---and often does---radically choose to take the leap of faith into total obedience to God resulting in the literal transformation of his life!

But how is it that a man, any man aware of his own human weakness and sinful nature and living among “men of unclean lips,” how is it, I ask, that a man prepares himself for such a daunting task? It all begins with a Christ-follower possessed with an undeniable and settled *knowing* in the city hall of his soul, that he

has God's calling on his life, and has, as well, a burning passion to honor that calling. He is not choosing that work because he has considered all the available vocational alternatives and decided, having completed a dozen psychological profiles, that this might be his best bet for an enjoyable and fulfilling life; he is, rather, under a divine compulsion whether anybody else on the planet knows or acknowledges that fact or not, and he cannot do otherwise. And, in response to that divine summons, he wishes to please his Summoner to the work. But where does he begin? Actually, he begins and ends at the same place, that place where he first heard the voice of his First Mentor ordering him into the work, and of the early preparatory days for pastoral work when he listened with open ears and a quiet heart to his Mentor's instructions. And he will return, ever and anon, to what he learned in those early days. Maybe it is true, indeed, that the most important things in life actually are learned in kindergarten. And what a blessing if, early on, his lesson-book was comprised, if not by John's twenty-first chapter specifically, certainly of the truths delineated there.

A final caveat: the reader will pardon, please, the biographical references. I have used them sparingly and, hopefully, not to the point of tedium. I have purposefully included them, however, because I perceive that we learn best by hearing of the journey of others. I have not out-preached my experience, have not embellished the events cited, and am hopeful they will "flesh-out" the "metaphysics" of our subject. Hopefully, they will aid in giving a "local habitation" to an"airy" abstraction, as Shakespeare put it. ("A Midsummer Night's Dream," Act IV, Sc 2, Lines 54-55) "Truth" and "honor" and "valor" and "courage" and "love" are all airy abstractions until they materialize in a human body; it is then, and only then, as we watch them function, that we "get it." The country pulpiteer put it this way: "Too many of us metaphysicians don't know how to tangibilitate!" I have prayed I might at least approach tangibilitation in these lines!

INTRODUCTION

“I think God has called me to be a pastor.” Has He, indeed! I remember when, with certainty but a measure of quiet trepidation as well, I said those words to my pastor. I was the first in my entire family tree, as far back as we can trace its limbs and branches, ever to be so called. It was a shock to my as-yet-unsaved Mother, a stunner to my high-school comrades in arms (!), and a joy to a small band of loving and gracious Christians in my little south Texas hometown.

In any case, having heard that sentiment expressed to me by young men for over half a century of pastoral ministry now, I am, as you say it to me, well, *intrigued*, I think, is the word. And thoroughly so.

Why intrigued? Think of it: such a sentence says that God is alive, that He is at His business, that He loves His sheep, that He is well aware that His sheep--like the other kind--need shepherds, that He has not ceased to speak His word of call to us, and that He has spoken that word to you. Personally! Convictingly! Compellingly! *With the result that, for both you and others, lives will be changed for eternity.* You can neither “call” or “uncall” yourself; neither can you ever---in many senses---go back to your life before that call. You are in the ring, the gloves are on, and the bell has rung! Part of the intrigue of it all is that, like the birth of new babies; no matter how many times it has occurred in human history, such an event never loses its wonder, especially as one looks back on it in retrospect, after years under its service. In fact, the wonder (read “appreciation,” “joy,” “sense of privilege,” etc.) grows. I know that statement to be true because two weeks ago, over half a century after ordaining hands were placed on my own head, I participated, with heartfelt joy and excitement, in the ordination of a young man to the military chaplaincy.

I do not have to ask you to explain His “calling.” I know you cannot easily or clearly dress that experience in proper verbiage. Like love and beauty and much else at the center of our existence, though it is a real, deep, existential, personal knowledge, it, nevertheless, defies explanation---*as it always has and always will.* And gratefully, again, like love and beauty, it does not demand explication. The philosopher George Santayana, an avid student of the subject of beauty, and who wrote a great deal about it, once said about his subject: “What beauty is and what it means nobody can ever say.” If it is impossible to explain it, it is also impossible for you ever to forget whatever it was that caused you to know and say such a thing. You will, betimes, as with your conversion experience and your falling in love, go back to it, draw strength and direction from it, and, as well, experience a palpable sense of cosmic peace from it in the maelstrom of the human circus. Further, it will fortify you for the task and keep you in the race when the enemy and all his friends have done their best to destroy your passion to obey that call. You may even come to say, as I have often, “If I lived a thousand lives, this is what I would do with all of them.”

My own purpose and passion in creating the notes which comprise this book is to encourage you in the journey, to rejoice in our collegiality---whether we meet on this side of heaven or not---in the work of a shepherd, and to share insights about our calling. No perfect historian or novelist or pastor ever wrote a book, but many imperfect people have blessed our lives by sharing theirs with us in writing. I pray these

words will have that effect in your life.

Just a couple of evenings ago, I enjoyed an organ concert in the church I now serve, performed by what can only truthfully be called a prodigy. During the concert, the organist spoke to us of his teacher of many years who, in a substantive way, was, from his boyhood, responsible for his love for the instrument he was playing. His mother told me, today, of a quiet question she was asked following the concert: "Have you ever thought how different your son's life might have been if he hadn't met Mrs. Tinsley?"

"Mrs. Tinsley," it turns out, is a riveting story. She was a university trained organist, notably accomplished on the instrument, and was highly sought out as an organ teacher. She had, however, reached her sixty-seventh year, and had ceased teaching. Some time later, she noticed a boy of fourteen or fifteen, sensed his unusual natural musical skills, and spoke to his mother about taking him on as a student. She had "a debt to pay," she said. The debt? It was in remembrance of her financial benefactor who had paid for her university education. She proposed to teach the lad, without remuneration, and coach him in the development of his obvious gift for the instrument. She spent the waning years of her life in great joy at her part in nudging musical genius out of her student.

You will spend the remainder of your life remembering those who, through the years, in innumerable ways, little and large, have formed and shaped your love for, and work in, the ministry of the Lord Jesus. And, if it pleases God, you will bless the Kingdom when, you, too, take on some neophyte and pour your life into his as he moves toward God's best for his life.

One of my last assignments during seminary days came as a suggestion by a theology professor to the effect that we should all, upon completing our seminary studies, read Helmut Thielecke's *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*. Unlike some of my profs, that specific man's suggestion was my command, so I purchased and read the small book, actually a book-let, and read it with care, and more than once.

Thielecke's small work is, in essence, a warning to us that the parishioners with whom we seminary graduates would now spend our pastoral lives are not theologians, will never be theologians, and that rigorous theology--as interesting as it was and is to us--would interest them very little if at all. Further, he suggested, for our own effectiveness and the welfare of our people, that we should digest that fact early on in our ministerial work. Since I was serving a country church at the time, Thielecke's counsel made eminent sense to me. His book, in fact, reminded me of how I had observed, already, in my dual role of student and pastor, that dichotomy which every pastor lives with. At about that time, following a scintillating discussion by a professor of philosophy regarding the Hegelian dialectic, I drove onto my pastoral field and stopped by to visit a poor but delightful farm couple, both octogenarians and faithful members of our congregation. Upon my entering their clean but shop-worn simple farmhouse, she, with obvious delight, told me that she had just found a new anti-acid tablet which assuaged the pain of her long-term stomach ailments, and he regaled me about a newly-minted razor which made his morning shave much more bearable, especially in winter. Even then, I was fascinated by the immense disparity of interests--the widely varying life-contexts,

among Christ's sheep. Thielecke's point? That the theologian and non-theologian (all the while admitting that all Christians are, by definition, theologians) must both remember that all Christians are brothers in Christ, and that the fact of that brotherhood stands above all other considerations. *Love for, and obedience to, Christ amid His people, is the ultimate theological practicum.* (Parenthetically, as I walked through their front door that afternoon, the small and withered wife was on tiptoe buttoning the top shirt button of her lanky and withered husband, and turning to greet me with a smile, she said, "Nowadays, pastor, it takes two of us make one!" I have thanked God for years for a beautiful marital sermon illustration!)

As to the specific "exercise" assigned the young theologian, Thielecke cautioned that he must not become prideful of his superior technical theological knowledge and come to experience theology not personally but *secondarily*, i.e., only through professional theologians. The theologian does not simply study theology as a mental discipline; he is always, first and foremost, a believer, amidst believers, in which context he is to live out his calling and the implications of it.

While Thielecke's soporific will always be necessary, another lack on the part of ministers, of a pronounced sort, pervades western civilization in our time, and demands close attention. Compared to Thielecke, my effort will be that of the poet's who, congratulated on a brief work of his, demurred, saying it was but a "modest hiccup of a minor poet." Even so, having tried all the anti-hiccup regimens of which I am aware, they---the mental hiccups---will not go away.

If Thielecke saw the danger of vocational ministers becoming *theological* functionaries, the current generation must see---and address---the danger of vocational ministers becoming *managerial* functionaries, hard-headed pragmatists instead of loving pastors, supervisors instead of shepherds, corporation moguls instead of Christian ministers, celebrities instead of servants. One is reminded of Wordsworth's characterization of a certain man who, devoid of any sense of the fathomless significance of a human life, would "peep and botanize on his mother's grave."

All astute politicians know that the way to ascend to the catbird seat on any issue is to define the terms of the debate. In our day, one hears a thundering silence on the specific subject of pastoral practice defined with true fidelity to the biblical pattern. I say "specific" because, despite the recent appearance of a spate of books on ministry in general, the subject of pastoring, per se, in terms of *pastoral formation*, is given little emphasis. I recently read a book on pastoral ministry which had much to say about various aspects of the ministry, *but I did not see a single line relating pastoral work to the New Testament definition of it, or a single line about the pastor himself--the pastor as a man, the pastor as a servant and representative of the Lord Jesus, the pastor as an intimate of God.* It may be said, "Well, maybe that was not the intended focus of the book," to which I say, "How can it not be thought strange that not a single word was written about the pastor himself or the New Testament perspective on either his *essential* pastoral work or his character?" It could be said, "Well, all of us take that sort of thing for granted," to which I say, "*I rest my case!*"

The president of our seminary, in his final message to the graduating class, had the audacity to stand before

us and ask if we were certain of our own salvation, of a right relationship to God through the finished work of Christ on the cross! He did so, I am certain, because he knew that many men---no less than a John Wesley or a Benjamin Keach comes immediately to mind (!)---go out to convert others when they themselves know nothing, existentially, of the saving grace of God in their own lives. And he also knew that to attempt to introduce someone to a stranger is extremely problematic! *No pastor can possibly hope to be heard who has only a second-hand experience of Christ.*

It is argued, presumably, even by some who have a high view of the biblical revelation, that the day of the pastoral or shepherding ministry is obsolescent if not obsolete. Widespread evidence suggests, despite loud protestations, conventional wisdom believes a biblical definition of such work is either not needed, or is not functional today. Its demise is welcome to many because our day calls, we are told, for altogether a new kind of church leadership than is espoused in scripture. The culture is running in a different direction and only the hopelessly obscurantistic would argue otherwise. An honest man has to, at the very least, concede this possibility: *It may well be that much of the frustration and misery which marks the modern pastorate is based precisely on a failure to pursue the New Testament model for it. We may well have created a monster which is now turning on us, against which we have no effective weapons. To put it otherwise: perhaps we have created a perverted taste in the mouths of our parishioners who have come, therefore, to expect what we cannot in good conscience satisfy.*

If, indeed, the New Testament portrayal of the work is *passe*, then let it be placarded throughout the kingdom. Let the church be informed, in clear and cogent terms, of such a change, and let the family of faith move on to whatever future the current mood might dictate or desire. And let it prepare for the changes which the kaleidoscopic philosophy-of-the-month will require! *And for the misery which will inevitably follow!*

If, on the other hand, we believe we can---indeed, must---abide by the essential biblical definition of the pastor / shepherd role, then let us delineate carefully the essential characteristics of such a vocation, and then ask ourselves serious questions as to our own personal fidelity to such a model.

Allow me to begin with a serious caveat: Hundreds of thousands of men now serve the Lord's church, as men have done since He was here, who are daily living out the biblical pastoral mandate. They serve in large and little parishes, in a vast variety of languages, in multicultural ethnic backgrounds, in a cornucopia of ministry contexts, and with training and educational backgrounds which range along a continuum from penury to plenty. They are marked by almost every difference imaginable, but by this sameness---a love for the Lord Jesus and His sheep and a life devoted to both. We must not forget or forego that loyalty to the image and practice of a true biblical shepherd. As British historian Herbert Butterfield says in his *Christianity and History*, no matter which period of modern history the historian considers, he must remember that there were always those who did not need to "wait for the millennium." Uncounted millions of Christianized common folk in every age went about honoring marriage, working hard, rearing godly families, paying their debts, helping their neighbors through difficult times, attending worship, and they did all that quietly, "under the radar" ---and in the process provided an *immeasurable*, a literally incalculable, blessing for their culture. Butterfield says that the historian often misses such people, and thereby, altogether misjudges their positive

influence on their culture. (7) What he says about innumerable “common” Christians I say about innumerable “common” pastors. Who can measure the rippling effect, both in time and eternity, of the unnamed and largely unknown pastors who are faithfully shepherding in unnamed and mostly unknown parishes!

I cite a single historical reference (but one of an endless list which only heaven will reveal) which will serve to assuage the pain of the *apparent* fruitlessness of such service to Christ, and will give the lie to it. At about the turn of the 19th century, a Scottish lad went south to Cheshire, England, with his family. Some of the members of his family had become involved with a tiny congregation of Wesleyan Methodists in High Leigh, near Cheshire. At the end of a year, the annual report of the church stated that there had been but a single convert during the year just past, “wee Bobbie Moffatt.” Wee Bobbie Moffatt, it turns out, became Dr. Robert Moffatt, the most celebrated missionary in Scottish history. He spent his entire life among South African tribespeoples, opening the gospel ministry to many villages, and, among other things, translated the entire Bible and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* into Setswana, the language of several Bechuanaland (now Botswana) tribes.

PART ONE: THE PASTOR'S FIRST COUNSELOR

The setting of John's twenty-first chapter is the Sea of Tiberias (or Galilee, or Genessaret, or Chinereth) on an early morning. We are not certain of the precise day, but we know it occurred between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension. Very probably, it followed close upon resurrection Sunday. The salient facts relating to the event seem to have been as follows:

Seven disciples of Jesus, Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, and two unnamed followers (who were likely, because unnamed, not apostles) have met and, following Peter's suggestion, have gone fishing. (There is no need to find fault with them, as some have; men must eat and making provision to do so need not reflect negatively on their devotion to Jesus. They were, after all, lifetime fishermen.) Having fished all night, as was customary, and by net, as was customary, they had not caught a single fish. Jesus, unbeknownst to them, appears on the shore and engages them in conversation, encouraging them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. The men obey the "stranger," throw their net into the sea and draw up a huge catch of fish. John, typically, *recognizes* the reality, announcing "It is the Lord!" Peter, typically, acts on the reality, diving into the water and swimming to shore (not "naked," but "stripped to the waist"). Jesus bids them eat food which He has already prepared, and they break their nightly fast. Apparently out of complete silence, Jesus engages one of them, Simon Peter, in conversation. We are not told that a Jesus said a single word to any other disciple, or that any one of them besides Peter spoke to Him. The two talk about Peter serving the Lord's people. The scene ends with Peter being commanded to follow Jesus and his agreeing to do so. As he begins to follow Jesus, however, he halts to ask Jesus about his fellow-disciple John's assignment. Jesus repeats His command for Peter to follow Him. He then pronounces a prophecy in reference to Peter's death. The scene ends with a brief conclusion to John's gospel, including a reference to the illimitable magnitude of Jesus' ministry, and of the end of human history.

The twenty-five verses reporting the scene comprise a rich compendium of instruction for all in Christian ministry and, as we shall see, for pastors in particular. A studious man could profitably spend a lifetime contemplating the implications, both explicit and implicit, which seep out of every pore of the passage. *The human being who is in serious pursuit of true wisdom will always be found at the feet of his First Mentor, Jesus, and, besides Calvary, there is no better place to begin, or end, than the final chapter of John's gospel. The passage has within it the "smack and tang of elemental things."*

What are the spiritual principles which we learn at the feet of our First Mentor from the passage? As we consider a few salient ones, may God give ears to hear, hearts to believe, and wills to obey to every Christ-follower!

OUR FIRST COUNSELOR IS ALIVE

The fact that Jesus shows up on the shore of Tiberius, among a thousand other things, separates Him from all other mentors. Any conversation regarding “first truths” begins and ends there, with Him, alive, alone, on the dais. It is no wonder, then, that “all the light of sacred glory gathers ‘round that Head sublime.” Add “all history, Christian and secular, as well.” What a disastrously faulty curriculum we subscribe to which does not feature that everlasting crucial fact! And what a disastrously deficient life we live if the same is not true. Indeed, it is the truth of all truths without which all other truth becomes mere flotsam and jetsam on the shores of the ocean of the human story, as does the life which does not recognize and receive it. It is simply impossible to overstate the importance of Jesus’ resurrection life, not as a bare historical fact which we intellectually accept, but *as a force operating existentially in and through us*. Let every pastor, not to say every Christian, remember the apostolic prayer: “...that I may know Him *and the power of His resurrection.*” (Phil. 3:10) Paul was to say later, “We are saved by His *life.*” (Romans 5:10) “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27) This is not “preacher-talk,” but identifies of the ultimate source of power in ministry.

Even a casual perusal of the New Testament makes it obvious that the Lord’s resurrection was the truth of all truths for the first disciples. If they spoke of worship, it was the worship of a risen Saviour. If they spoke of prayer, it was prayer to a risen Saviour. If the subject was personal ethics, it was the risen Christ living in them and enabling them to do what otherwise was impossible for the “natural” man. If they spoke of their fellowship as a congregation, it was a congregation with a living Head, the Lord Jesus Himself. Central to any consideration of eschatology was the return of the risen-and-ascended Christ. To put it otherwise, they could not have imagined understanding the universe in any other light than the light of that morning’s Tiberias—the radiant fact of a Man having risen from the dead who now, as a living being, sat and conversed with them. It is a horror that Christians of any age can lose the sense of that striking uniqueness of our holy religion. All true Christians love their Bible, but none are bibliolators. No thinking man dare worship it. It is that other *Word* which we do worship and for which we hunger, in imitation of the Tiberias experience:

Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord to me,
As thou didst break the bread beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page, I seek thee, Lord;
My heart pants for thee, *O living Word!*
(Emphasis added)

The pastor who has no risen Christ living inside him and does not have consistent communion with the Him is destined, infallibly, to be a non-conductor of spiritual electricity. That is not to say he is to attempt to produce such power; which is impossible; it is to say he is to be a channel of it. A man once heard Spurgeon preach and went away saying, “The man spoke as if Jesus stood at his elbow.” Holy Writ says, “They took knowledge of them (the apostles) that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13, KJV) The fact of Jesus’ resurrection is the first truth of Tiberias, and of incalculable importance for all pastors, young, old, and otherwise. One asks, in all seriousness, and with sincere pity, of other religious spokespersons of every sort: “What, in the name

of common logic, is their message on Easter Sunday mornings?" Our resurrection message is not a prideful boast, but the announcement of historic fact. And if a man cannot, or will not, believe it, let him lay aside his religious regalia and pursue, for his own sake and the sake of his auditors, some other vocation, and let him do it immediately.

JESUS MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO HIS DISCIPLES

For our Lord to be alive is one thing; to see Him as alive following His crucifixion is altogether of a different order. Three times in this chapter, John uses the verb *phaneroo* in that regard. It means to shine forth, to make visible or clear. We get our word "phenomenon" and its kindred words from it. One philologist says of "phenomenon" "...there is (in it) a "sense of extraordinary occurrence, portent," which sounds much like its New Testament meaning. John loves this word and its cognates, using them 18 times in his New Testament writings.

The import? Let every Christ-follower expect for his Lord to "shine forth" in whatever way He chooses in our ministries *whether it is visible to the natural eye or not*. Again, the substantive difference between Him and all other "saviours" in human history is that our Saviour is not only alive and present, *but makes Himself manifest* in our ministrations. No preacher / teacher of the word of God who has been so engaged for any length of time is ignorant of those visitations and comes, in his maturity, to take heaven by violence that the Lord will make Himself known, having learned by personal experience that the fishing is unspeakably easier when He does. Many saviours have become famous for hiding, but of ours, it is said, "He could not be hid!" (Mark 7:24) Samuel Beckett's famous theatre-of-the-absurd "Waiting for Godot" ("Waiting for God" many literary commentators say) is, alas, the experience of *billions*, but not for us! God arrived!

Paul says, on that subject, that Jesus has saved us, he has summoned us ("He called us with a holy calling"), and---using John's word *phaneroo*---He has showed up! (II Timothy 1:9-10)

As I write these lines, I am looking forward to speaking to a young man, a collegian, this afternoon about his relationship to the Lord. He claims to be an agnostic. You will know that I stand convinced "all is vain unless Spirit of the Holy One comes down" in that setting, causing both of us to experience the power of the living Saviour.

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus," said the Greeks in John 12:21. Their wish was often inscribed on pulpits in earlier days, and serious modern disciples continue to echo their wish today.

JESUS ALWAYS MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO HIS DISCIPLES AT THE RIGHT TIME

The disciples know Jesus has risen from the dead at this juncture. They have literally been in His physical presence following his resurrection. They are, however, puzzled and, obviously, have little sense of direction. Why, otherwise, would they not now be running off in every direction trumpeting forth the glories of their risen Saviour. To put it frankly, after a resurrection, how could they be content to fish? And what would their future history have read like, one asks, if Jesus had chosen not to appear at this precise time and place? No one can give certain answers, but the questions themselves are unnecessary. Jesus does show up, as *He always has and will*, at the right time.

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of our walk with Christ is that He shows up when He deems wise, and not when we do. *No seasoned disciple has not had a conversation with Him on that subject.* Man is very rarely, if ever, precisely on time; he is either early or late. Jesus gently taught the two sisters of Lazarus to trust His perfect timing, and we must joyously, even if puzzled, yield to it as well. *For anybody else to have shown up on the shoreline that morning would have produced a tired yawn. And further, one surmises, the fishermen would not have obeyed anyone else's suggestion / command to throw their net into the water again.* All of His followers will, therefore, treasure our Mentor's promise of knowing when and when not to show Himself, and to rest in the knowledge that He will, infallibly, do so at the right time. Who can plumb the depth of joy in John's voice when he says, "It is the Lord!"

AT TIMES, WHEN JESUS IS PRESENT, HIS DISCIPLES ARE UNAWARE OF IT

Again, none of the seven knew the identity of the figure on the shoreline, and were totally unaware, early on, that it was Jesus. Apparently, nobody even suggested the possibility. To state the fact of our ignorance of His presence at times is to simply acknowledge it, as did the two Emmaus disciples on resurrection Sunday, who will forever wear the fame of their ignorance. But then, He had hidden Himself, even as He does here, and as He often did---and does---for His own redemptive purposes. It is His prerogative. He knows how and when and where to show Himself. All His wise followers readily admit our Mentor is teaching us that there are always more eyes upon us than may realize at the moment. And we must surely know, *and minister on the basis*, that whether we see Him or not, He is always present. In fact, can never be "unpresent." *Jesus is always present but, alas, He is not always manifestly present.* There is His presence, and there is His *felt presence*. Hebrews 13:2 admonishes us: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels," and experience and testimony force us to add---not only angels, but the Lord Himself. One should read here, with profit, Markham's "How the Great Guest Came."

William Blake has a line about our limited vision which could profitably serve as a lifetime of meditation. Of ocular experience---natural vision--- he said one is often led "to believe a lie when he sees with, not

through, the eye....” Seeing “with” the means that the eye scans surfaces; seeing “through” the eye means that we see *beyond* appearances and into the true nature of things. In one case, we see *materiology*; in the other we see *meaning*—such as the presence of Christ Himself when He appears to be absent. By such sight one sees, for instance, as James Russell Lowell said, “...behind the dim unknown, (God standing) within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.” Every Christian lives with the knowledge of God’s *personal* on-mipresence, and of the fact that He, betimes, steps out of the shadow to minister to His own. No man who does not see *through* the eye will ever see that reality with it. In fact, in a serious sense, he is blind though he sees, sightless though seeing.

It is not religious twaddle to say that, in the tortuous meanderings of the human journey, the believer may expect to hear our Lord’s voice, “Be not afraid, it is I.” And the wise man waits for it. And listens for it. And longs for it. To pastors I say: if at times you are not afraid, you simply do not understand the situation. Knowing He is watching wonderfully concentrates the faculties and quietens the heart. If He is not watching, all is lost; if He is watching, all will—*in time*—not only come out right, but make sense as well.

The true pastoral instinct and instruction is stated by Habakkuk: “I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and *watch to see what He will say to me*, and what I will answer when I am corrected.” Later he says, “...the Lord answered me and said...!” (Habakkuk 2:1-2, emphasis added.) The Psalmist puts it this way: “My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning—yes, more than those who watch for the morning.” (Psalm 130:6)

To repeat: if Tiberias represents spiritual kindergarten it also represents spiritual graduate school. Let every student of the *words* and *works* and *ways* of God not limit his study to Tiberias, but let him know, at the core of his existence, that he will never learn deeper or more foundational truth than what he learns there.

JESUS KNOWS WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE LIVES OF HIS DISCIPLES, AT ALL TIMES

That statement borders on repetition, but even if so, it is worth repeating. It must be obvious that when Jesus asked His question about the success or failure of the catch, it is not as if He did not already know the answer. It is an established biblical principle, evidenced as early as Genesis 3:9 (“Where are you, Adam?”), that when God asks a question, it is never to obtain information, but to cause the person questioned to face up to the facts. Here it is done ever so gently without a hint of criticism. Further, when Peter says (v17) “Lord you know all things; You know that I love You...” we have a clear reference to Jesus’ omniscience. There is here a play on the words translated “know”. The first, *oidas*, a perfect form of *eido*=to see, so literally, “You see all things,” meaning “by divine insight.” The second is *ginoskeis*, “You know all things by experiential observation of me.”

Walk through your life as a pastor and never be afraid that Jesus does not know, by whatever means, more

precisely than you can ever imagine, what is happening in your life and mine. Calvin held that everything that has ever happened, is happening, or ever will happen, is currently before God's eyes; He exists in the eternal present which swallows past and future. Though, in obedience to His word and in accordance with two thousands of years of Christian history, we live in prayer, we can never forget His word that "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." (Matthew 6:33) That knowledge is a potent force against the enemy's entire arsenal of anxieties, and an absolute necessity for undistracted service to the King.

A necessary and blessed correlate of that fact is that Jesus knows, as Peter is either taught, or has reiterated here, the entire course of our life and ministry until our final day on earth. Jesus does not engage in unnecessary activity, and for Him to predict Peter's martyrdom is a singularly unusual but entirely fitting conclusion on the subject of his omniscience.

Intense discussion has surrounded Jesus' reference to Peter's old age. Perhaps Jesus is only saying here that Peter's famous will is to be superceded by that of others when he is old. He has always moved about as he has willed, but now the Lord Himself will increasingly direct his will until his final days when others---because of his advanced age---by the action of their will, they will clothe him. Perhaps he is referring, say others, to a winding sheet which will be wrapped about him in preparation for his death. That position is denied by others who say that such cannot be the case because the order of events are wrong; the "girding" would precede, not follow, his holding forth his arms. Very probably, although we do not know precisely how such "girding" took place in Jesus' day, or even precisely what it meant, the sentence, "This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God" (v 19) patently speaks of Peter sealing his testimony with a martyr's death. We know, further, that since Tertullian (210 A.D.) the tradition of Peter being crucified during Nero's reign (54-68 A.D.) has been well known, and since Eusebius (260?-340? A.D.) the tradition that Peter chose to be crucified upside down has also been established.

It must not be overlooked that Jesus promises that in his death, Peter would "glorify God." Let every servant of God know that, in the tortuous vicissitudes of his life, whatever the date and time and place and circumstance which mark his homegoing, by God's grace, he will be enabled to glorify God in the event. And let him rest in the interim between today and that day in another fact: God does not give dying grace before it is necessary. Our Mentor has assumed the task of watching over Simon Peter and every other pastor for the entirety of our personal journey!

We will never know until we know everything all that this passage—or any other---means and does not mean in regard to Christ's omniscience; we need not, however, wait until then to revel in it. Jean Paul Sartre, the French existentialist atheist, was terrified, he said, by the image of an all-seeing eye in the heavens gazing incessantly at his every move. Above all things, he wanted and sought "personal freedom." The paradox is incisive: that which produces unfeigned terror in the unbeliever produces unfeigned peace in the believer. Further, it is kindly noted, "personal freedom" is capable of several extremely disparate meanings.

JESUS COMMUNICATES WITH HIS DISCIPLES

To state such a fact sounds simplistic, at the very least, and, for many moderns, the implications of that leads into questionable theological territory. It conjures images of people running about declaring flippantly, if well-meaning, that “God has spoken to me personally” and accusing God of saying all sorts of strange things to them, things that often do not square with the biblical revelation. Men exist who speak too mystically of God to be of any practical help in the real world, whose speech is theirs and not God’s. A striking paradox is apparent at this point: in a world teeming with people desperate to hear from some sort of a god, and going to frantic lengths to hear such messages, accompanied by what can only be called a media frenzy on the subject of ghosts or extra-terrestrials communicating with us, many Christians who hold a Bible in their hands, almost every page of which has the one true God speaking to His people, are looking askance at the legitimacy of such a phenomenon!

The profound implications, however, of communication between Jesus and His followers demand that we address the subject in this context. To begin with, all orthodox theologians hold that the ultimate purpose of God in creation is to manifest His glory. One essential aspect of the manifestation of that glory is His relationship with man, whom He has created to have fellowship with Him, not only in time, but in eternity. The following is a typical statement of the purpose of the creation of man:

While God presents Himself as a transendent God, He is also immanent, seeking fellowship with man. He recognizes the creation of man as very good (Gen. 1:31); He creates man in His own image and likeness that He may have a relationship with man and that man may rule over the earth (Gen. 1:26); He speaks with man (Gen. 1:28-30); He creates an environment especially for man (Gen. 1:3-25, 29-30); He tests man’s loyalty (Gen. 2:16-17); He seeks man (Gen. 3:9) (8)

“He speaks with man.” “He seeks man.” The Bible is a book replete with references to God speaking to, and with, men, and our text is a classic example of that activity. Our question is, however: does Jesus speak to men today as He did in biblical days; if not, why not, and if so, how?

Modern Christendom is peopled with numberless followers of Christ who never expect Jesus to speak to them directly and personally. The whole idea seems strange to them, essentially because of His physical absence from us. They expect to learn about Him through the Bible study, to listen to what He said to the disciples of His own era, to learn basic biblical principles from such situations, perhaps they even expect Him to guide them in some undefined sense, and pray for Him to do so. All we need to know, it is affirmed, sometimes vehemently, is what is written in the Bible. To go beyond the written word is to denigrate the Bible, to call its sufficiency into question, and to submit to the quicksands of theological subjectivism with every man having “a psalm, a hymn, a revelation” which may be hopelessly inconsistent with biblical truth. A leading Christian attorney said about a well-known pastor friend, “He’s off his rocker; he thinks God talks to him personally.” The godly wife of an American vice-presidential candidate was once interviewed by a leading media figure about her prayer life. She was asked by the puzzled media mogul, on national televi-

sion, if, indeed, the persistent rumor was true, i.e., that she actually had “conversations” with God, as had been widely reported of her. She might have responded: “Yes, I do, precisely as have the leading figures in western civilization for two thousands of years now.” She was kinder, but no less pointed, in her answer.

For many, prayer becomes a form of auto-suggestion, a one-way speech *at* God which, while it may be of some emotional value, does not objectively change anything. When such a theory holds sway, “communication” with God becomes a monotonous monologue instead of a dynamic dialogue, such as occurred at Tiberias, and one cannot be surprised that modern Christianity is marked, even among its leaders, by its shallow prayer practice at best and its prayerlessness at worst, as a plethora of current studies indicate. *Protestations aside, in actual practice, prayer is not a high priority in much, perhaps most, modern Christendom.*

To suggest that Jesus does not communicate with His own today except by the objective word, the Bible, betrays a profound ignorance of the Bible itself, and is a denial of the experience of countless millions of Christians. Some who deny the possibility of hearing subjectively from God actually experience what they say cannot happen! I once heard a pastor talking about the subject, denying that Jesus currently speaks to His own subjectively. He was then questioned as to why he had chosen to marry the woman he did. Being an honest man, he finally admitted that, yes, he had asked God whether he should marry her, and that God had assured him that he should do so. In fact, he was very certain that God had made His will known to Him in the matter. Thankfully, no one asked him to quote a biblical text in which her name appeared!

To say that we should not ask Jesus about subjective issues and expect answers regarding them---which person to marry, whether or not to pursue certain vocation, which university to attend, if any, which house to purchase, or if one should be purchased at all, whether or not one should engage in a certain mission project, how much one should give to such a ministry, etc., *ad infinitum*---is to practice a form of functional atheism. If the theory is true, what chapter and verse, what biblical character, what biblical principle, would one turn to in defense of such a position? If God has not given us any insights beyond the Bible, well and good; we shall have to make do with that and love Him for it. On the other hand, if we are not to ask God to speak to us regarding current contextual matters by means of His Holy Spirit, we dismiss that possibility at the risk of incalculable loss of spiritual direction and power. *In fact, to state the problem is to posit a “Christian life” which saintly people of all ages would not recognize.* Particularly is the need to hear answers for the current context true of the pastor who is constantly faced with issues which demand, not the knowledge of some categorical biblical principle---as crucial as that is---but specific guidance for a specific moment in his own or for the congregation’s current journey. Why should he not ask for a word from His Lord, and receive a specific answer from Him?

Our focus here is not the many ways in which Jesus subjectively speaks to us today, nor to suggest His communication techniques are always as clear as we would like or wish. All communication is imperfect at best, and is as varied in its means and effectiveness as there are humans on the planet. A Welch lass, hearing a discussion about how the Lord speaks, offered her insight: “I don’t know how He speaks to anybody else, but I know that He always talks to me in Welch.” That answer is much more profound than it appears at

first sight: God, in His sovereign wisdom, is faithful to speak to each of us in accordance with our individually-unique capacity to hear.

As to the mystique of communication, Desmond Morris, a student of non-verbal communication, in his sociological classic *Manwatching*, says tens of thousands of wordless gestures made by humans have been catalogued, each of which is designed to communicate something. Even if difficult, however, by whatever means God sovereignly chooses, let the pastor expect the same blessing which the first pastor, Simon Peter, received at Tiberias, i.e., specific answers to specific questions in his current station in life. *And let congregations know that when they pray for God to speak to their pastor, they are on solid ground in doing so---and should not be surprised if and when God answers their prayers.*

One is forced, on the subject, to ask (a) Why would we find, on almost every page in the Bible, God speaking to His followers if He does not do so now, (b) Why, if Jesus obviously spoke to His followers often and plainly, and with such patience, at times explaining to the slow to understand what He meant, and manifested an obvious joy in doing so, would He cease to do so today? Who can forget His “With desire I have desired---the words are from *epithumia*, a word which is full of energy and passion---to eat this Passover with you?” (Luke 22:15) *We are forced to admit the possibility that Jesus is just as passionately desirous to speak to and with His modern followers as He was His first ones!* (c) How is it that Jesus promised that He is the same, “yesterday, today, and forever,” if in fact, He has substantively changed His method of communication to His modern followers, (d) If such a subjective word cannot be trusted, why would multiplied millions of His serious followers avow that upon the basis of such a subjective word from the Lord, they had totally altered their life’s journey, had surrendered their lives to mission stations all over the globe, had invested vast sums in various ministries, had, in what appeared to others to be irrational or impetuous moves, left successful pastorates to take up ministries in barren backwaters, etc., etc., for two thousands of years? And affirm to the end of their days that they never doubted it was God’s plan for them to do so. Every such “serious follower” of Christ would also avow something else: *that whatever God had communicated to them in such a manner never violated what was written in scripture, but gave them light for their current journey on the basis of biblical truth. It was not new inspiration which they received, but new illumination---God’s direction for a modern context. God’s voice, however spoken, is inexorably compelling.* One must admit that the odds are literally beyond astronomical that all such experiences were and are spurious.

A final “why”: Why would the Lord Jesus promise in a verse (Revelation 3:20) He used to bring countless numbers to Himself (including the author) in salvation which specifically promises a life-long fellowship with him, and then engage in such a “fellowship” without ever speaking to His child about current issues in his life? Are we to think that we are to “sup with Him and He with us” in silence? I know of no interpreter who does not observe the obvious about Jesus’ statement: that in Jesus’ day, to “sup with,” that is, to eat with, refers to communicative intimacy. One must note, as well, that the verbal form is in the future indicative, indicating a “durative” or on-going process.

The apostle John said a great deal about such intimacy, surely remembering the Tiberias event. Three times

in John 10 (vss 3, 16, 27) he quotes Jesus as saying His disciples hear Him, and twice (vss 4, 13) he quotes Him as saying they “know” His voice. No one can legitimately argue that Jesus was referring merely to literal shepherds in light of the fact that, beginning at verse 6, He explains His illustration, speaking pointedly of His own shepherding ministry which is marked by communicative intimacy between Him and His sheep.

Parenthetically, whether God does or does not speak in such subjective ways today, the attempt to prove that He does not based on I Corinthians 13: 9-11---which is the only passage I have ever heard used to deny such activity on His part---will not stand scrutiny; no classic commentary so interprets the passage. There is not a scintilla of evidence that “that which is perfect” refers to the biblical canon being completed which, it is held, makes subjective informational processes unnecessary. Nor will it do to say “The situation of proving the legitimacy of the apostolic work demanded that God speak in such ways during the New Testament period, but now, since the gospel has been authenticated, it is no longer necessary.” God’s supposed subjective silence today, then, is based on poor exegesis, a theology based on sheer supposition, and flies in the face of the credible testimony of countless millions of faithful Christians. **Further, if any generation that ever lived needed a fresh authentication of the truth of the gospel message, it is our own!**

Certainly, none of that is in any way or to any extent to belittle the biblical revelation, or to lessen one’s passion to study it consistently and to obey it immediately. *The Spirit of God speaks in biblical language*. Neither is it to say that we need a subjective word about everything. We should waste little time asking God whether or not we should obey any one of his explicit commands. (There is a famous passage in an old English essay where a strong if uninstructed Bible-believing man prays about whether or not he should murder his mother-in-law!) Many, indeed, most of our serious ethical enigmas, have been answered by the clear language of Scripture. Mark Twain once said that it was not the part of the Bible he did not understand that bothered him, but the part that he did understand! Twain’s personal spiritual perceptions aside, no one would disagree that there are ethical and moral issues for which we have no sure and certain biblical answer. In light of that easily provable fact, nothing should deprive any one of God’s children from hearing His voice on such matters or situations.

Consider a single instance which has all the characteristics of the common experiences of all growing Christians in this matter. I would be surprised to hear that any maturing believer has not had similar experiences, demonstrating God’s immense joy---not to mention His practicality!--in speaking to His people today. The event will, infallibly, whet the appetite of all Christians to listen for the Lord’s voice

A pastor was praying one morning and the Lord broke in and spoke clearly to him about a godly teenaged girl, a member of his congregation, who had a severe and chronic case of eczema which reddened every fold of her skin. God’s specific word was, “Go tell D _____ that I have healed her.” The pastor continued praying and the Lord repeated Himself: “Go tell D _____ I have healed her.” Having learned that one wastes precious time arguing with the Lord, the pastor arose, went to his car, and began practicing his speech as he drove toward her house: “The Lord just told me He was going to heal you.” The Voice again: “Do not tell her I will heal her, but that I *have healed* her,” a command which the pastor had never heard before (and,

as it turns out, never heard again). The pastor then began praying that the girl would not be at home. The Lord either did not hear his prayer, or disregarded it, because, as the pastor made his way to her house, the teenager turned a corner in her car, and was heading directly toward the pastor. He flagged her down, windows were lowered simultaneously, and she said, "Hey, pastor how are you?" "Fine, and you?" "Great! Where are you going?" "Well, I was going to see you, but we can just talk right here," desperately hoping for a very short conversation. He drew a deep breath and said, "The Lord just told me He has healed you." "Great," she said, "what else did He say." "That was it," said the pastor, and with a hurried "Have a great day," he drove off. The girl's father called the pastor *the following day* and said, "When D_____ awoke this morning, her skin was as clear as a newborn's backside!" Her eczema never returned.

We hear, often, of people who were legitimate heirs of fortunes but who, for whatever reason, never received the largess. Let the pastor--not to say every Christ-follower (!)--realize that he lives in relative spiritual poverty who does not learn to expect Jesus to speak today, let him wait patiently for that word, let him listen quietly for it, and let him to be prepared to obey it even before it comes because he knows the certain blessing that follows. As he listens, let him listen also for "repeats," that is, for testimonies from others that they have heard the same things, have been moved by the same passage of scripture, etc. When asked, God will often repeat His command. No person should act on another's conviction, but sometimes, such "repeats" come which are mathematically highly improbable. *Immediate obedience is the one act which guarantees the continuance of the conversation! I repeat: immediate obedience is the one act which guarantees the continuance of the conversation!* Can it be surprising that so few experience such things when the question to God, and the answer from God, is followed by an adamant, even if kindly, refusal to obey His voice? *Heaven passes on no hypothetical issues.* If one is not serious about obeying God, let him be encouraged to save both his and God's time before asking God for direction. As the Scots say, "Save your breath to cool your porridge!" - God is not obliged to speak, but if He chooses to, the disciple's word is spoken by young Samuel, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears." (I Samuel 3:9) A corporation executive and a prince of a leader in Israel who often chaired the Finance Committee of his large church had a famous saying when asked about a financial matter: "Don't ask the question if you can't stand the answer!"

Will miscommunications occur? Of course they will, even as in all attempts at linguistic interaction. A large portion of humor is based on the inevitability. The other question is rarely addressed: how many miserable and lonely and fruitless lives have been lived out by faithful Christians because they never knew that God had a fresh and relevant word for them? And how many a congregation sits in the doldrums with no wind in its collective sails because neither the pastor nor the lay leadership nor the members themselves ever hear a word from God, or ever expect to, regarding the direction of God's work?

Observe as well that problems are often resolved, doors are opened, valleys are filled, mountains are leveled, and roads made straight without such a subjective word from God. He is sovereign and may manage His kingdom any way He wishes. That cannot possibly mean that He is never allowed to speak in the way we have been discussing, beyond the objective word.

Parenthetically, much of this is applicable, with the necessary changes, to marital communication, or the lack of it. Many silent marriages can be explained by an unwillingness of one or both partners to engage in honest and patient and continual communicative intimacy. *No partnerships of any kind flourish apart from two people continuing to attempt to communicate. No relationship, human or divine, is possible without intimacy.*

JESUS DESIRES SUCCESS IN OUR MINISTRY AND SHOWS US WHERE THAT CAN BE ATTAINED

Some few commentators state that any observant fisherman of the day would have been able to see movement in the water and thus would have known the location of the fish. I myself grew up amid such men and have observed their prowess in such things when fishing with them. It is obvious that what we have here, however, is an unquestioned miracle. These are not neophytes, but men who have studied every ripple of the sea of Tiberias for a lifetime. Our “take-away” as pastors is very simple: yes, of course, we listen to men of experience, we study sources sacred and secular to better understand our task, but---no matter how provincial it sounds---we will be forced by the adamantine rocks of reality to look to our Lord for success in the ministry. That is heaven’s basic policy, *despite appearances to the contrary*. Much of what we call “growth” may well bear a different label in eternity. It is the same with much that we call “miracle.” The New Testament certainly espouses a theology of quantity, but a quantity which is produced by God Himself.

To put it otherwise: what we are doing is either natural or it is supernatural. If it is natural, we ought to admit it, and master and use every natural insight and ability; let us become hard-headed pragmatists, put on brass knuckles, and get on with the fight, and *expect natural results*. On the other hand, if it is supernatural, let us be as wise as serpents, harmless as doves, all the while in total dependence on God to visit our efforts with success. As a young preacher, I once heard an elderly saint pray, just before he walked into the pulpit, “Lord, I declare bankruptcy on me” (I thought, “Dear Lord, I know that’s true, but is that the end of it?); he then went on to say, “*but solvency on you!*” Every pastor who has been beyond his uncertain baby-steps in the work will know precisely what the man meant, and will be breathing a heart-felt “amen” to God upon reading those words. As it is with all truth, I suppose, the truth of a truth is first spoken, then at some later point, believed, and still later, becomes a passionate heart-cry to God as its implications are more fully understood. For a beginner to say, “I trust God” is one thing, and may well be the full truth for him at the moment, but later, it is different---qualitatively *and* quantitatively. In fact, the day inevitably comes when the Holy Spirit teaches His pastors this lesson: “You really do not want to waste your time building God’s kingdom by your definition; it is very hard work and will all be ashes one day and you will stand naked for the true spiritual fraud you are, even if you have convinced yourself that you are well-meaning. *The ark does not need propping up, by you or Uzzah or anyone else!*” (II Samuel 6:6-7) While a university student, serving as the student pastor of our church for the week, my senior pastor was affirming me for having made such a wise choice for a wife. He asked me if I loved her. I thought it was a strange question. I said I did and he responded, “Well, you do and you don’t... as you will see.” I was puzzled then. I am not now! I was in a mentoring setting and did not know that either, Again, I do now! That conversation housed an immensely

important spiritual principle which all pastors do well to remember in dealing with their flock: *no man can be expected to know what he cannot possibly know.*

That Jesus desires our success in ministry is intimated by the unusual size of the catch, and the report of the precise number of fish which were caught. Students of the New Testament are intrigued by the various (and sometimes mysterious) interpretations given to the 153 fish. (See the commentaries for the various interpretations.) What we have here, whatever the metaphorical or parabolic meaning of the number of fish (if there be any) is, again, a miraculous catch. Every man who fishes remembers his biggest catch (numbers are running through my head as I write this!). Why does John tell us that the fish were counted precisely, that they were “large” fish, were *apparently* caught in one sweep of the net, and that the net was not broken, if not because those facts surprised everybody on the scene, especially when they remembered---as they would have---an earlier fishing experience recorded in Luke 5:1-12 when, it is to be recalled, these very disciples were first called to be fishers of men. And further: why did both John and Peter respond the way they did if no miracle occurred?

It must not be concluded, however, that we are always able to quantify spiritual success. In fact, the attempt to do so is one of the saddest sights in Christendom. If liars will not enter heaven, many Christian “counters” are in serious trouble, and every Christian should be sobered by Paul’s reminder that we “must provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” (II Corinthians 8:21---The passage relates specifically to money management, but it manifestly speaks of integrity in all Christian conduct. “Before” in both cases is *enopion*, from *en*=in, and *opsis*=face, thus, in the eyes of! Both God and man are watching!)

John quotes Jesus as speaking of four quantities of fruit in the Christian’s life, as reported in John 15---no fruit, fruit, more fruit, and much fruit; he adds that the Father is glorified when we do, indeed, bear much fruit. (John 15:8). Jesus also spoke in quantitative terms in Luke 14:16f, where He sends out his servant (note the singular) at suppertime to invite people to his banquet feast. When the servant’s invitation is rebuffed by all, Jesus quotes the master as saying, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel (*anang-kadzo*---passionately and lovingly persuade) them to come in, that my house may be filled.” Peter himself tells us “...God is not willing that any should perish but *that all should come to repentance.*” (II Peter 3:9) No human was ever as concerned about “numbers” as God is!

Fish-counting in the ministry, however, is a dangerous, and sometimes, lethal activity. Man’s pride is so insidious that few of us can be trusted with many fish. I have never heard of a man taking a large catch home through an alley, saying nothing to his friends about his fishing trip. Many men who look askance at “numbers” in the ministry are only too willing to speak to the largest of congregations! A wag once put it this way: “I’ve noticed that the men who run numbers down don’t usually do much to run them up!” In somewhat the same vein, Soren Kierkegaard once observed that it was not the men who suffer most like Jesus who are the most popular preachers; it is, rather, the men who can most graphically describe His sufferings who are chased after. The mentoring truth here is of our legitimate expectation that God will produce fruit

in our lives. Although we cannot expect to see all our fruit on this side of eternity, we will yet consistently and sincerely give all glory to God for whatever He chooses to accomplish through our ministrations.

The maturing shepherd also, while passionate to see his own flock grow, will come sincerely to thank God for every effort on anybody's part to minister the gospel. Peter's apostolic brother Paul speaks of people who

"...preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will; the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." (Philippians 1:16-19)

JESUS LOVES HIS DISCIPLES AND HE DEMONSTRATES THAT FACT TO THEM

His love is both spoken and demonstrated and received in the Tiberias experience. "Spoken?" No word that He utters here, and nothing He does here, can be interpreted as being born of anything but love for His followers. "Demonstrated?" Tiberias is inexplicable, in its entirety, apart from Jesus' love for His own. *Jesus does not engage in unnecessary activity!* He has an entire universe to manage, but He spends hours with fisher-folk! "Received?" Yes, John's singular claim to fame is his being "that disciple whom Jesus loved," and no disciple--then or now--has any grounds for doubting Jesus' love. Who can imagine any one of the seven in heaven not treasuring every second and every syllable of their Tiberias experience! They must surely have parsed the conversation endlessly for nuances which might have initially been overlooked. I once attended a funeral of a Christian leader whose four children began their remarks in much the same way: each said something like "Of course, as everyone knows, I was my father's favorite." So will say each of the Tiberias seven, and so will say each of us. G. K. Chesterton once said that the most difficult thing in the universe to believe is that "I matter!" But he did, and we do, and we cannot afford ever to forget that fact. Paul said "the Son of God... loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." (Galatians 2:20) And Jesus promises, in Revelation 3:20 to "sup with" those who allow Him to take up residence in their lives. To "sup with," to eat with, again, patently speaks of an intimate and life-long fellowship with each of His sheep. Even though, very obviously, every Christian does not have that experience, he may and should, *and every church has the right, yea, the necessity, to be shepherded by a man who has it as well.*

A personal encouragement is appropriate here. I encourage you to travel no farther along the road of discipleship and service to the Saviour until you hear Him say to your own heart that He loves you. To read it in a book, or hear it from others, is one thing. To hear it from the Saviour's mouth is entirely another. Admit to Him that, while you can never fully understand that fact, you do accept it. Upon getting that matter settled, you will, hopefully, hear Him say another word which in terms of your emotional health is vitally important: that He not only loves you but that he *likes* you as well. "Love" is one thing and "like" is another.

(Actually, the two words are somewhat akin to the two words translated “love” in our text.) To hear Him say that is the way, the only way, you will ever overcome certain dislikes you have about your personality. Consider how difficult it must have been for Peter, surely knowing his tendency to irascibility, to impetuosity, to cowardice, to impulsiveness, realizing how markedly unlike his beloved brother John he was, a man whose personality was so consistently characterized by wisdom and restraint, imagine, I say, how difficult it must have been for him to face his troubling personality traits, and how important it was for him--on his road to Christian maturity—to leap the chasm between “love” and “like”! And then, let us contemplate, how very important that entire process was to the health of his sheep. We are all, after all, commanded to love others *as we love ourselves*. There is a biblically authentic self-love, i.e., an acceptance of our self as accepted by Him, which is vitally important to the minister’s health, and enabling in his ministry.

That is not an invitation to relate to Christ and/or others solely on an emotional level, or to allow the emotions to over-ride the cognitive processes. Nor does that in any way release any disciple from growing in Christlikeness. It does, however, make the royal road to Christlikeness bearable if we can shed the burden of being emotionally plagued, not to say paralyzed, by the knowledge of our warped idiosyncrasies. As with everything our dear Mentor has to teach us, this is a crucial lesson, and one which we must commit to practice!

JESUS SERVES HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus is accustomed, since the beginning of His relationship with His followers, to serving them. Here He gives them the precious gift of His time (for at least the third time since His resurrection), He solves their vocational problems for them, He prepares breakfast for them, He sacramentalizes their lives by assigning them redemptive ministries, and promises to lead them in those ministries. The command is to “follow,” not “go out there on your own and do the best you can.” Following is obviously impossible without a leader. He had earlier sent the seventy out “before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.” (Luke 10:1) Before they got there, He had already arrived. That was, and is, a remarkable service to His people---*indeed, unique in the history of the race*.

His serving them breakfast surely brought up images of the many times throughout His ministry when He, in one way or the other, had actually physically served them. And, one hopes, caused them to reflect on His last seminar with them before the cross, in the course of which He washed their feet and instructed those who wished to be greatest in the kingdom to achieve that rank by serving. And, surely, of watching Him die in His ultimate service to them and to us, “placarded” (Galatians 3:1) naked before the watching world as vermin, as the ultimate act of service in human history!

At the risk of sounding hopelessly simplistic, the vitality of one’s spiritual life is defined by *the awareness of the extent to which--at the present moment!--Jesus is serving His own*. Before we were breathing, Jesus was serving us. As we speak, He is serving us--among other things, by allowing us to breathe! When we have

breathed our last, He will still be serving us! In Hebrews 7:25 we are told He “ever liveth” (KJV) to make intercession for us. In Hebrews 13: 5 He promised never to leave us or forsake us. He has delivered us from the wrath to come, He is now doing so (I Thessalonians 1:10), as He will endlessly! Literally! *All of that is rather telling, in view of the fact that none of it could truthfully be said about any other “saviour” in human history.* No context ever occurred, is occurring, or ever will occur, in which Jesus Christ has not been, or will not be, in the process of serving each who belong to Him. The very magnitude of the miracle is very likely, given our earth-bound condition, to be lost on us.

JESUS PLACES INESCAPABLE DEMANDS ON HIS DISCIPLES

The implications of Jesus’ commands for Peter to follow Him are far-reaching. To begin with, no man dare begin the pastoral journey apart from a sure and certain sense of that call. Describe it any way you wish, down in the citadel of your soul, you must know it to be true, and true for you personally since God enters every soul through a private door. Other voices will concur in it or criticize it, accept or reject it, believe it or disbelieve it. None of that matters in the end. No man is so lazy as he who pursues another man’s call. Or so inept. Or so unhappy. Or so frustrated. Or so empty. Spurgeon consistently, and wisely, said to his would-be pastors in his pastor’s college: if you can do anything else in the world and live with yourself, do not become a pastor. I just finished a conversation with an embattled pastor from another state, a true young champion in Israel. His flock is growing and thriving, and his detractors, who for decades have watched over a defunct ministry while sitting in their chief seats therein, are livid because they are now losing their clout. I said to him, “There is not enough money in your town to pay you for what you and your family are going through.” On the basis of his call, however, not only to the pastorate, but to that specific congregation, he is joyous in Christ and under the control of the Holy Spirit and---though the animus against him has existed since he arrived (and long before with other pastors!), he does not want to move to another church, but positively desires to remain where he is serving. He is, in fact, vigorously planning to “lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes” in the life and ministry of the church. An hour before that conversation, I spoke with another young pastor from yet another state who was told just yesterday by a man leaving his staff, “I’m leaving this job. I’ve had enough. Pastor, I just told my wife yesterday, ‘I do not, under God, know how that pastor puts up with the junk he faces every day.’” The pastor said, and I quote him verbatim: “Brother, it’s simple; this is my calling.” That defines the word that Chrysostom said was the queen of all virtues, the beautiful New Testament word makrothumia, the Greek word that speaks of keeping cool under fire, of quiet but joyous persistence in God’s way, the capacity (said Chrysostom) of “standing strong when the wind is in one’s face.” “Behold,” James said, “we count---present tense---them happy who *endure*---present tense! (James 5:11; actually the Greek of the text is “Behold, we are counting blessed the ones enduring the endurance.”) A poll among Christians of various denominations, which drew over three thousand responses, asked this question: What is the key virtue you want in your pastor?” The rather surprising answer most often given? “Coolness under fire.”

You will note, as well, that the call of Christ is, as always, open-ended. Follow you where? Follow you for how long? Follow you under what conditions? Follow you for what remuneration? Follow you with whom? *Ad infinitum, ad nauseum!* He who is infused with the holy bone-fire of Jeremiah needs no answers to such questions, in fact, typically, they never occur to him when God initiates a call to ministry. The response of the truly called man is that of the apostle: “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!”

But what about those who, for whatever reason, leave the pastoral ministry? Leaving what we call the vocational ministry may or may not have anything at all to do with following Jesus. Men leave the pastorate for all sorts of reasons, some legitimate and some not legitimate. More about that later, but here, let us observe the apostolic rule: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” (Romans 14:5; that sentence has to do, in context, with the *adiaphora*, “the things indifferent” in the believer’s life, but surely is appropriate to many other settings such as, for instance, whether or not a man should remain in a specific ministry.)

The command to follow Christ, it is to be noted, is precisely that: a command and not a suggestion! The Greek verb is in the imperative mood, the language of command. It is also in the present imperative which speaks of durative or continual action---do it now and continue to do it. And to all would-be followers of Jesus---in or out of the vocational ministry---it is, after two thousand years, still in the present active imperative!

That word sent Peter out to a lifetime of faithful ministry to Christ even as it has sent other men and women out across the planet bearing witness to their Lord---through painful and pleasant days---until the end of their days. And, God be praised, on this day He will call others with the same calling.

A final word about the “burden” of the responsibility of God’s call is appropriate. It is a burden in at least two senses: (a) It is a tough job! It is not for the timid. Or the faint of heart. Or the timeserver. Or the hireling. Or the undisciplined. Or the uncommitted. Or the lazy. It demands the best that a man has---and much, much more. It is at times, in the flesh, unbearable. Let no man be deceived about that. *It is a burden.* (b) The burden of it also, however, speaks of the *gravitas* of it, the seriousness of it, by which a man’s life is sacramentalized by bearing it. That makes the load bearable. “His commandments are not grievous” to the God-called, God-enabled man. He comes to realize, late in life if not at the beginning, that the man to be pitied is not the man who is possessed of a passion which motivates him to give up life away in service to the King, but the poor wanderer who meanders through life destitute of any powerful and compelling life-purpose. Henry Kissinger had it right: “People think responsibility is hard to bear. It’s not. I think that sometimes it is the absence of responsibility that is harder to bear. You have a great feeling of impotence.”

WHEN JESUS CALL SENDS OUT HIS DISCIPLES, HE GOES BEFORE THEM

It is no little thing to speak of a very simple thing: if I ask you to follow me, I have made an explicit promise to you that I will go before you and lead the way. To state that fact does not require logical expertise, but

it does remind us of a pivotally important ministry fact: wherever Jesus sends you, He is already there. He did say, in a much earlier setting, “go your way” (Luke 10:3), but previous to that command Luke has Him saying that He “sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where *He himself was about to go.*” (Luke 10:1) Those two young pastors? The calmness of their souls is based, substantively, on the fact--and their knowledge of it--that Jesus saw their current scene before He created the Alps. He arrived on their field before they did.

No servant of Jesus ever went anywhere unvisited by Jesus! No matter how God-forsaken the place seems to be, no matter how weak the Holy Spirit’s power seems, no matter what substructure and superstructure Satan has constructed, no matter how long it has been since God moved mightily there, no matter how thin the resources, or how few the soldiers of the cross---God’s Son arrived before you did, and will remain long after you are gone. Our business is to see what the prophet saw---“And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha,” and to pray what the prophet prayed about his servant: “Lord, open his eyes that he may see.” (II Kings 6:17f) If it worked then for a man “of like passions as we are” why would it not work for us now? As the Lord Jesus said, however: “According to your faith, so be it!” (Matthew 9:29, KJV)

JESUS DOES NOT ALLOW HIS DISCIPLES TO EXCUSE THEIR DISOBEDIENCE

One of the most poignant passages in the entire New Testament is that which describes Peter, beginning to obey Jesus’ command to follow Him, and then turning about and seeing John *already following Jesus* (see verse 20), and asking, perhaps with puzzled mien, “But, Lord what about this man?” The Greek reads “and this one what?” Who can restrain himself from asking, “What could possibly have prompted Peter to ask Jesus that question?” Was it that he was afraid to follow Jesus alone? Was it that he had some inkling that his role might be more difficult than that of John---especially with the hint of his own martyrdom in the air? Was it (as some have said, without any sort of justification) that he was jealous of John in some way? Was it that he was simply temporizing, holding off as long as possible his departure on his dangerous trek? He was, of course, well aware of the deadly forces which had so recently murdered his Lord and he knew the livid hatred of both Roman and Jewish authorities against those who saw Jesus as the messiah. We can never know the complete answer; what we do know is that it represented some sort of hesitancy on Peter’s part to follow Jesus immediately and unreservedly.

Jesus’ response is fascinating, and highly instructive. He speaks of His own will (“...if I will...”) in contradistinction to Peter’s will. It is no longer Peter’s will, but the will of the Lord Jesus which must now and forever dictate his actions. “My will, Peter; My will, and not yours any longer!” Jesus did not state what His precise will was regarding John, with the result that Jesus’ statement was distorted by church gossips. Jesus says to His early pastoral student: “Simon Peter, son of Jonas, hear Me carefully: do not waste your time worrying what I will or will not do with any of My other followers; that is My business and not yours. It is

not about what you will; it is about Me and what I will.” The breaking of the will, *without destroying its force*, is Christ’s first business with all His followers. It is the first and final test for all disciples—will a man abandon his own plans and those of all others to follow Jesus without qualification or caveat, or will he not. It is as if Jesus is saying: “We must get this settled once and for all at the inception of the journey; I must hear you say whether you are abandoned to Me or not?” L. E. Maxwell once famously said in that regard: “God can thresh mountains with a worm if He can get all the wiggle out of it!” The title of Maxwell’s best-known book is *Abandoned to Christ*—a graphic picture, and a necessary experience for all who wish to mean much to the King.

Kingdom work often suffers from self-appointed busybodies, who, though they never see themselves as such, and are perhaps well-meaning, believe they should be managing a large segment of God’s business. They believe, and often say, that “destiny,” if not God Himself, has called them to do so. The disease is attributable to all sorts of spiritual viruses, but it usually comes down to arrant pride. We must not accuse Simon of that, but neither must we forget his notable tendency to position himself in front of the troops. Whether his question is born of his natural disposition to direct the operation or not, Jesus repeats with His command, “Follow Me!” But this must not be missed: Jesus did not repeat His earlier command. True, it sounds as if He did in the English translations, but the two commands are different. *One of the uniquenesses of the Greek language is that the position of the word in the sentence demonstrates its fire-power.* Jesus’ second call to follow actually reads: not “Follow Me,” but “YOU ME FOLLOW.” And who does not suspect that it was spoken with a heightened strength of voice? Remembering his fabulous “Christ and the Apostles at Emmaus,” who does not wish a Caravaggio had captured our specific moment on canvas! Imagine the various expressions on eight faces about a breakfast campfire at the first promise of the approaching sun across the hills of Moab to the east!

And imagine, as well, the redemptive upheaval in the Kingdom of God if all Christ’s disciples, beginning with His pastors, absorbed and put into practice the truth expressed in His response to His querulous neophyte named Simon Peter, Son of Jonas: “YOU ME FOLLOW”!

JESUS PROVIDES AN ENDLESS DYNAMIC FOR MINISTRY

The energy which fuels a lifetime of passion in the practice of the pastoral ministry to the Lord’s flock is manifold: there is the power and presence of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and many other “hidden allies” in assistance to the man of God. One that is rarely mentioned is cited here by John, *although Peter did not hear it since he had been murdered some twenty-seven years earlier than when John penned the fourth gospel.* But the truth remains and modern pastors will do themselves an immeasurable favor to ponder John’s statement: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (vs 25)

Surely John meant something like: “If every single episode of Jesus’ life and teaching, and the implications thereof, were reported in detail, the library would be composed of innumerable books.” We are, admittedly, hypothesizing, but if we limit it to that interpretation, we are---in confessedly immense understatement---contemplating a library of astronomical proportions. Let the pastor, old and young, ingest and digest this fact: no one who perceives but a very limited perception of Christ’s glory could ever speak of “running out of material to preach!” In his Ephesian letter, Paul, in one of his richest sentences, has this: “To me, who am the least (the apostle coins a word here, *elachistotero*=“the leaster”) of all saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:8) “Unsearchable” translates a word which refers to “a track which cannot be explored, inscrutable, incomprehensible,” or as a maritime term meaning “unfathomable,” which is Moffatt’s translation of it. Let every man consider this fact: if he preached only on the words and deeds of Christ recorded in the New Testament---which represent but a thin sliver of the whole of His life---he would never lack for food for Christ’s flock. Spurgeon once preached a series of sixteen messages on Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus on the subject of the new birth. When criticized by a parishoner, who asked why he would not leave that specific text, Spurgeon is reputed to have answered “Because ye must be born again!”

Shakespearean scholars indicate that there no single day has ever passed since the poet died on April 23, 1616, that one of his plays has not been performed. Surely, no day has passed since our Saviour ascended to heaven in which thousands of sermons have not been preached about Him, *even though He ascended to heaven almost 1600 years earlier than the poet’s death!* And such will be the case until the Lord returns for His own. One of the pastor’s chief pursuits is to become so saturated with the truth of the life of Christ that he will never hear the word the Samaritan woman said to Jesus (in one of the most ironic sentences in human history): “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.” (John 4:11) Indeed, we have little equipment to draw with and the well is fathomlessly deep, but our enabling grace is precisely that---the enabling grace of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Whom we live and move and have our being.

We who feed Christ’s sheep must never forget the depth of the well. All that reminds us of Luther’s famous essay “The Treasury of Merit,” written to counteract the doctrine of so-called “works of supererrogation,” i.e., virtue produced by an overage of good works by saintly people could be transferred on Judgment Day to those less worthy. Luther said Christ was our “treasury of merit,” and no other merit was needed but His own. So say we, not only about salvation, but about food for the sheep.

JESUS PROBES THE CONDITION OF THE HEARTS OF HIS DISCIPLES

Say we not well that no true mentoring, in a Christian sense, in all its infinite expressions, succeeds without dealing with the condition of the source of all ministry, the “heart,” i.e., the inner man, the spirit of man and/or the soul of man. The consistent message of the Bible is that all God-followers must give careful and continual attention to the condition of the heart. “Out of the heart are the issues of life!” That sentence expresses one of the most distinguishing marks of Christianity in contrast to all other religions. After spending

all of my adult years in the pastorate, and most of those years personally mentoring men, I know that men, even after months (and sometimes years!) in intense mentoring sessions, can obey all the rules while the heart remains untouched. It is, alas, a tendency not reserved only for the laity!

The central focus of the Tiberias experience, patently, is Jesus' desire to speak to one of His disciples, and one only, in very specific terms, about the condition of his heart. We have no indication that any of the other men said a word, or that Jesus said one directly to them. We do know, and cannot miss, however, the indescribably tender but intensely pointed discussion between Jesus and Simon Peter---the subject of which was the condition of Peter's heart. Jesus knows that Peter's heart is not fully prepared for ministry yet. He also knows that Peter will miss the central focus of His attempt to mentor him properly for his shepherd's role if he does not deal with the heart issue. Jesus knows every step of Peter's future, from his role in the fledgling church all the way to his martyrdom, and He knows that the central issue on Tiberias' shoreline is the level of commitment of the heart, the man's true self, of His disciple. *Then and now, if the heart issue is right, everything is right; if that issue is not right, nothing is right. Let no man be deceived by appearances: it is the heart that carries the feet, not the feet that carry the heart.*

Several things are to be observed before we speak specifically of the content of the conversation. First, Peter had been following Jesus closely for three years, from the very beginning of Christ's ministry. (See Luke 5:11 and Matthew 19:27 where Peter says, "See, we have left all and followed You," etc.). He had often made professions of his faith in Jesus including the notorious one at Caesarea Philippi where he becomes the first disciple---if we have the entire story---to recognize and confess that Jesus is the Messiah. He is a devoted, if inconsistent, follower from the beginning and is what in truth can only be described as not a but the key leader in Jesus' entourage. Peter's significance in that regard is fully evidenced in the gospel accounts. He, with James and John, unquestionably form the Saviour's cabinet, as it were, the triumvirate leadership group of Jesus' ministry team. The three of them, alone, were vouchsafed the experience of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 8:28), the healing of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:51) and Christ's agony in the garden (Matthew 26:37, Mark 14:33). But even in the inner circle, Peter appears to be the leader as well as the spokes-person (perhaps unelected!) for the group. His name always appears first in the lists of the apostles. He always answers for the disciples. He is closest of all to Jesus during the final hours, even if that served as the occasion for his utter failure of will. Further, we know that, on resurrection Sunday, Jesus and Peter met (Luke 24:34, I Corinthians 15:5) before our current scene at Tiberias. Precisely what transpired between the two in that (or those) discussion(s) is unknown to us but, it is obvious by what transpires here that Peter's commitment to His Lord was in some way unsatisfactory, that Jesus---at a minimum---desired to "nail it down," as it were, to finalize it, by offering Peter yet another opportunity to express, or reiterate, his true feelings---and commitment---to his Lord.

Those who have only a vague knowledge of a man named Simon Peter, Christians or not, will often know about his denials of Christ, the rooster crowing, his bitter tears, and, perhaps, his reputed role as gate-keeper of heaven! All who know him well would immediately say that no biography of the man is anything like complete however, if the Tiberias Tryst is unknown.

The tryst is, at bottom, Peter's Mentor dealing with the key issue of his life---not to mention that of every Christian pastor in human history. The key issue? Let's listen.

John implies that no words are exchanged during the breakfast meal: "...none of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who are You?' knowing it was the Lord." Apparently, rather abruptly, not to say loudly, Jesus engages Peter in a discussion. No other disciple enters into what becomes personal and pointed. Perhaps they experienced what modern psychologists call *schadenfreude*, i.e., "I'm not happy this is happening to you, but I am certainly glad it is not happening to me!" Note carefully how the questioning goes, in a play on several Greek words (which are in the textual, not the lexical, forms):

SET ONE:

Q: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*agapas*) me more than these?"

A: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (*philo*) you."

R: "Feed (*boske*) My lambs (*arnia*)"

SET TWO

Q: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*agapas*) Me?"

A: "Yes, Lord, You know that I love (*philo*) You."

R: "Tend (*poimaine*) my sheep (*probotia*)"

SET THREE

Q: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*phileis*) Me?"

A: "Peter, (grieved) Lord, you know all things; You know that I love (*philo*) You."

R: "Feed (*boske*) my sheep (*probotia*)"

Before looking at the central issue in the exchange, it is first to be recalled that this event is occurring within perhaps as few as four or five days (though we cannot prove that) after Jesus' resurrection. The "more than these" almost most certainly means (despite various other suggestions) "more than these other disciples." Peter had boldly promised, with them present, that he would die before he denied Jesus, and---it is to be remembered---all the other disciples made the same promise. "Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You. And so said all the disciples.' (Matthew 26: 35) It cannot be by chance that Jesus asks Peter three times about his devotion; that, patently, is why Peter is "grieved." Many other subtleties are suggested in the text, but are not our specific focus.

To begin with, it is imperative that we students of the passage, listening carefully to our Mentor, get the big picture. The essence of the session is love for Christ and service to His sheep---*the two indispensable elements of the pastoring calling*. With that in mind, this:

SET ONE: Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. In doing so He uses the Greek word *agapao* (the lexical verb form), which speaks of the highest and most altruistic expression of love, an activity which refuses to take any sort of an advantage of another or to abuse or misuse them in any way because of their innate value and worth. Peter cannot rise to the level of that word in his response, but uses another Greek word, *phileo*, (again, the lexical form), a word of affection, of friendship, of loyalty, with the aspect of emotion in it. (Another Greek word, *eros*, and its cognates, which speak of erotic love, are never used in the New Testament.) Jesus' response is: feed My *arnia*, My lambs.

SET TWO: Jesus asks Peter again if he loves him, using the same word, *agapao*. Peter is still unable to use the nobler term and repeats his *phileo*. Jesus' second response is: tend (or shepherd) My *probotia*, My sheep.

SET THREE: Jesus asks Peter if he can honestly even use the word *phileo* in describing his love for the Saviour. Peter doggedly continues to use the lesser *phileo*. Jesus responds with: feed My *probotia*, My sheep.

THE FOLD

Note several distinctions which our Mentor makes here. The pastor's business is to shepherd all the sheep, *arnia* and *probotia* alike. Interestingly, the first word is used *only here* in the entire New Testament; the latter is used only here *of the entire flock of sheep, but of Christ twenty-nine times by this same author, John, in the book of Revelation!*

Whatever their limitations, all of Christ's sheep belong to Him and must be shepherded. They each have a God-given right to that; it is a central aspect of their inheritance in Him. Every pastor looks out over a congregation made up of unbelievers and Christians at every stage of spiritual maturity. It is nothing short of amazing that God has provided a means to minister, to some degree, to every one of them--at the same time! And amazing, as well, that He loves each one equally, *and that the shepherd must as well*. I once was praying about a woman, informing (!) the Lord ever so gently that I thought she might be at least a bit odd, carefully choosing my word. She had given me grief ever since joining the fellowship, and was a continual disruptive influence in the family of faith. In that prayer, the Lord spoke to my heart (not audibly; it was louder than that) and told me she was saved, that His Son Jesus had bled and died for her, that she was my sister in Christ, that He knew of her problematic behaviour, but that I must never, in any way, be unkind or hurtful to her. You may imagine that I was quick to ask if, indeed, I had mistreated her in any way. He assured me that I had not--but that I must continue to show, more than mere tolerance, but love and patience to her.

One remembers, in this context, Peter's experience (recorded in Acts 10) in which he sees, in a trance, heaven opening and a "great sheet bound at the four corners" descending toward him. In the sheet are all sorts of animal life and Peter is bidden to "Rise and eat." He responds in a truly Petrine manner: "Not so, Lord!" Momentarily, Peter's logical powers prove to be non-functional; one can obviously say "Not so" or he can

say “Lord,” but he cannot rationally say both. Like Peter, every pastor needs to revisit that scene and hear heaven’s message that day: “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.”

THE FUNCTION

It is further to be noted that the two words here which describe the function our ministry are (in their lexical forms) *bosko* and *poimaino*. They are different and their distinction must be thoroughly digested by every shepherd of God’s people. *Bosko* refers simply to the act of feeding. There is no need, I feel certain, to speak at length here about that key responsibility of the pastor. Congregations will starve without a steady diet of the word of God---that diet alone which is specially designed for the health of all Christ’s sheep. The pastor must be certain that in his pulpit---and private---ministrations he is faithful to that vital feeding aspect of ministry. *It is easy to speak of the responsibility, but a lifetime of diligence is required to fulfill it.* “Am I, both in public and private, faithful to my calling to hold forth the word of life?” is the consuming question throughout a pastor’s life. If a man is not possessed of a keen passion for lifelong study of the Bible and a correlative passion to share his findings there with others, let him not deceive himself: he is not called to the pastoral ministry. Further, let every pastor know that he will stand before God as a failure if he does not have a God-given hunger to know and feed others the word of God, regardless of whatever else he may accomplish. One must be painfully honest in such self-examination and about his answers as well. It does not demand that he become a biblical scholar; it does demand that he be a biblical student, and one who is animated by the Holy Spirit’s gift of experiencing “the joy of shared discovery.”

In all of this, it is as if the Divine Chef hands us a dish in His kitchen and bids us deliver it to His people---without altering it in any way between the kitchen and the table. What a consummate fool the miscreant is who believes that he must, or can, improve on God’s culinary creation for His people---by addition *or* subtraction. “Well, perhaps a little more sauce,” or “It is a tad bitter to my taste!” or, “I’m substituting a creation of my own which I recently learned in a French culinary institute.” Et cetera! The *way* in which God’s food is displayed on the serving tray will inevitably be different for every server thereof, but what they serve will forever be the same---the endlessly varied and enjoyable and health-producing Word of God! *He who created the palate knows what the palate requires! And enjoys!*

Pastors are having a rough time of it in our day. Who can remember the portrayal of a pastor in a recent book or movie or television series as a noble character, even an intelligent one? He is consistently painted---if at all---as an odd character, out of step with the culture, the defender of lost causes and forsaken beliefs at best, or as a buffoon or moral degenerate at worst. Pastors are the butt of media jokes, the laughingstock of “polite” society, his so-called “calling” is denigrated, and the book of God is reviled as but a collection of ancient mythologies---and forgeries at that. It is a time when we hear, insistently, that the apostles of Christ, if admitted as ever having existed, were plagiarists and/or charlatans. Christ is charged with unspeakable sexual liaisons with both men and women, and books and movies and essays flood the market “proving” that

such things actually occurred. One observes crowds paying millions of dollars to view pornographic movies made about our Lord, accompanied by the inevitable accolades from media moguls and theologically leftist university professors. Pastoral illuminati stand in pulpits preaching fine shades of pantheism to congregations engaging in activities which David Wells said, “In another age (such activity) might well have been viewed not as Christian ministry, but as comedy,” (9) Cadres of clerics defend every moral degeneracy from porn to pedophilia, and declaim about of the “heroism” of standing for “women’s rights,” which includes taking the lives of the unborn, all the while assuring us that “Jesus would be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us!” In such a context, the man of God, in order to be a true champion in Israel, must be possessed of an unwavering belief in the legitimacy of his call and in the book he holds in his hand. He must be prepared to spend his life standing athwart such a culture shouting a resounding “NO!,” secure in His Caller and his calling, *and his message*. Further, he must expect things to worsen, according to the explicit teaching of the Bible. He must, without contentiousness, “earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints!” (Jude 3) “Earnestly contend” is one word in the Greek; we get our word “agonize” from it. It stands there forever to remind us that a passionless and apologetic Christianity is impotent. As is a message not grounded on the bed-rock of provable historical facts. *Nobody is drawn to the life of Christ preached by a fearful and insecure man dead in his soul who drones his message as if he is reciting last week’s laundry list.* “The opposite of love,” said Elie Wiesel, “is not hate, but indifference.”

Much of the distaste, it must be candidly admitted, for the modern church has been created, not by lassitude alone---toxic as that is---but by moral laxity, by the openly aberrant behaviour of far too many of its leaders, and especially its shepherds. The loss of trust in Christian leaders, which some evidence suggests is at an all-time high, is tied inextricably to headlines reporting the absurdities of pastoral lifestyles which reports are, alas, all too often accurate.

All that demands that the man of God must fully digest Christ’s solemn words to His first true shepherd, Simon Peter, and prepare, if need be, for martyrdom. And even if not for physical martyrdom, for a lifetime of loyal and faithful service to Him in a culture which runs, rapidly, in the other direction---which service, in itself, is a form of martyrdom. If he does not develop a sufficiently strong spine to stand strong against a culture headed for hell with the book of God in his heart and hand, he is simply not equipped for the task---as time will infallibly demonstrate. If his life bears all the marks, at times, of warfare---it is only because that is precisely what it is! The enemy might show up as piranhas or gnats but his goal is the same---to bring down the man of God. This is the point: spiritual spinal strength, both in pastor and people, is embedded in that word *bosko*, the process of ingesting and digesting God’s word.

But there is another word here describing the function of pastoral ministry; it is *poimaino*, to tend or shepherd the sheep. (The word “Pastor” is but a transliteration into English of the Latin word for shepherd.) It is the much more expansive word than *bosko*, and includes a broad spectrum of ministrations to the flock. To put it another way: in order to define the word, one needs simply to ask, “What do the sheep need?” It is easy to evade the issue by saying that such a question is absurd if it implies that a pastor must meet every need any parishioner might ever have. It is necessary not to evade it, however, *because Jesus used it to define*

our work! Add to that this: understanding and abiding by the meaning of the word will prevent pastors from separating themselves from the sheep by claiming that their ministry is essentially talking, and that engaging in a ministry so defined is true to the Bible and therefore totally acceptable. We hear, increasingly, of the “teaching” pastor or elder, derived from I Timothy 5:17, as if that single phrase defines the pastoral ministry. Another recent escape mechanism from pastoral ministrations is to say that one is not a shepherd but an apostle, and that apostles do not involve themselves in hands-on ministry. The problem with that position is that it flies in the face of the ordination of the very first of all pastors in the history of Christendom! It is not only anti-Tiberias to the core, but no complete reading of the New Testament could ever legitimately conclude that such a limited definition represents the divine view of the matter. The “teaching elder” passage is to be taken with scores of others which define our work, including Jesus’ specific command at Tiberias. The word refers to the entire office of the pastor---protecting, guiding, mentoring sheep to maturity, caring for their needs, warning them of danger, etc., etc., including the more narrow “feeding” aspect itself. The first word is general, the second one narrow, and is swallowed up in the general. The sad effect of accepting such a narrow and unbiblical definition has produced pastorate devoid of personal counseling, personal visitation, personal hospital ministrations, personal evangelism (producing the mind-splitting oxymoron, a non-soul-winning pastor), little if any personal social time with members (the exceptions involving those of wealth or prestige), even personal staff administration. And what of that central pastoring function, *the personal mentoring of Christians toward spiritual maturity?* One wonders what Peter might think if he knew of such a situation: a shepherd who does not in any substantive sense shepherd individual sheep, but only talks to the entire flock, and that for only thirty minutes on Sunday morning! *“Absentee shepherding” is a tough phrase to parse!*

It is only fair to add that all pastors are, or will be, asked to do what ten men could not do. Surely, no pastor has ever laid his head on his pillow at night having done everything all of his parishioners want. A pastor, perhaps in a cynical mood that day, journaled the following about the frustrations of the pastoral role:

If I wanted to drive a manager (in a corporate setting) up the wall, I would make him responsible for the success of an organization and give him no authority. I would provide him with unclear goals, not commonly agreed upon by the organization. I would ask him to provide a service of an ill-defined nature, apply a body of knowledge having few absolutes, and staff his organization with only volunteers. I would expect him to work ten to twelve hours per day and have his work evaluated by a committee of 300 to 500 amateurs. I would call him a minister and make him accountable to God. (10)

The astonishing fact, however, is that in the light of the essential accuracy of the foregoing, there remain approximately 400,000 Christian ministers of various kinds functioning in America today, and God continues to call a new generation of shepherds out for service to Him and His sheep in spite of the sometimes maddening challenges related to the work.

A woman, desperate to be on close social terms with our family, expected---she said---to be able to have a meal with our family at least once a week. I explained to her that I had calculated that, if we ate with one

family of our membership a week, it would require something beyond a dozen years to cover them all. Her response was, as she shrugged her shoulders, “So?” Then this: “Pastor, I think you’re building a wall around your house, but, you know,” she said through a smile, “birds can fly over walls!” I said, “Yes, that’s true,” returning the smile, “but it’s also true that I am a very good shot with my sixteen-gauge shotgun!” Actually, our families had genuine affection for each other, but she did, indeed, expect a pastoral work of supererrogation and every pastor’s wife would immediately be fully aware of it.

I have often thought that if a man wished to become a shepherd of literal sheep, even if he had no previous experience whatever, he could become a very effective one by doing certain things: First, he would have to possess a genuine respect and affection for the owner of the sheep. Then he would have to spend time carefully watching the sheep, in an attempt to discover their needs. Then, at some point, he would have to give himself to the task of actually attempting to meet those needs. The day would come when, in my parable, the shepherd would achieve excellence---simply by watching the sheep and meeting their needs. *That is to say, in actuality, the sheep would form the shepherd!* A visitor from another planet might interpret the relationship of the shepherd and the sheep in precisely that way. (“Look, the sheep are actually calling the shots because the shepherd immediately meets whatever need they have! I wonder how they communicate with each other so effectively?”) The more insightful would know however, that such a situation does not mean the sheep would be forcing their will on the shepherd---a thing unthinkable. It does mean that their *needs* would force themselves upon him, and that meeting those needs would form and shape the shepherd of our parable. None of that would prevent the shepherd from disciplining the sheep, since discipline is one of the *needs* of sheep at times. His discipline, though, would always be redemptive, and would have the best interests of both his master and the sheep in mind. Discipline is rarely difficult if the pastor has the sheep on his heart and not on his nerves! *All of that is as predictable as the law of gravity, assuming the man was sane and desired above all things to please his master.* That word, *poimaino*, precious beyond calculation, forever calls each pastor to surrender to the Lord Jesus, but also to surrender to the sheep assigned to him. Yes, surrender!

An interesting biblical anecdote demands a hearing at this point: Psalm 78 records the fact that an Israelite lad, David, grew up caring for sheep and that he was “taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes that had young...” and was called by God “to shepherd Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.” (Psalm 78: 70-72) *With David, as with all shepherds, integrity of heart precedes skillfulness of hands, the former creating the latter!*

Before we leave our subject, let the pastor both relish and take caution from the “good shepherd versus the hireling” discussion in John’s tenth chapter. The Lord Jesus, God be praised, uninterruptedlly lives out His goodness towards His flock, and His undershepherds are expected to do the same. He is, in that respect, as in every respect, our mentor. The hireling flees at the first sign of danger or dislike or disgust or difficulty, and he runs because he has no interest either in his master or his master’s flock, but only in his own paycheck. It stretches the imagination to envision the hireling *admitting* he respects/loves neither the shepherd

nor his sheep---*he simply lives out his disinterest, his life giving the lie to his speech.*

Often, the wisest thing that can one can do is to restate the obvious; if the Lord Jesus did not love the members of His flock He would never have set pastors before them. That fact is of seminal importance in any discussion of the pastorate. Pastors do not exist as a culturally-produced phenomenon, as some theological or religious aberration, or as the vestigial remains of a sick medieval Christendom. *The Christian pastorate is a Christ-thing! It is birthed out of His love for His sheep, by their nature and His, and He planned it long before he created the Alps!* It is decidedly no afterthought. Neither is it as if He had no other options. The principle of a God-ordained pastorate is clearly stated many times in the scriptures, nowhere clearer than in Ephesians 4:11, “And He Himself *gave* some ...pastors and teachers” (or, as some translate, “pastor/teachers”). That principle produced the specific event at Tiberias as it does---ideally--- every occurrence of any pastor who has been, or ever will be, ordained in Christian history.

Christ’s love for His sheep (our personal Mentor on the subject, it is to be remembered!), is memorably stated in Matthew 9:36. We are told that when Jesus saw the common populace, the “multitudes,” that “He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” The words, so familiar to our ears, convey vivid images. “Moved with compassion” translates a single Greek word that is the strongest means in the language of expressing overwhelming emotion. Other translations speak of the people as “distressed and scattered” (American Standard Version), “torn and thrown down,” (Rheims), and “mangled and thrown to the ground.” (Berkeley) The Greek, specifically, says “distressed” and “prostrate.” Those words present, for all time, a heart-rending view of heaven’s perspective of people without pastors. They will inevitably cause a like response from truly God-called men. “Let those things break my heart that break Your heart” is his watchword and constant prayer.

A final observation regarding Jesus on our function: He uses “feed” first, “tend” second, and returns to “feed” in His third response. His reason for doing so has been debated, but I take Trench’s position as an adequate explanation. First, he says about the “*tending*” aspect of the work:

There is a fitness in the shepherd’s work for the setting forth of the highest ministries of men for the weal of their fellows, out of which the name, shepherds of their people, has been continually transferred to those who are, or should be, the faithful guides and guardians of others committed to their charge.” (11)

He then answers the question as to why Jesus returns to the specific work of “*feeding*” the flock. The answer is, he says:

“this, namely, that whatever else of discipline and rule may be superadded thereto, still, the feeding of the flock, the finding for them of spiritual food, is the first and last; nothing else will supply the room of this, nor may be allowed to put this out of that foremost place which by right it should occupy. (op. cit.)

I quote here a lengthy passage, *written almost fifteen hundred years ago*, which is as relevant and refreshing as if it

had been composed today for pastoral neophytes by a pastor seasoned by age and experience. It was written by Benedict of Nursia, founder of a Catholic monastery, and laid the foundational base for the Benedictine Order, as it does today for many other Roman Catholic orders. For “abbot,” then, we should read “pastor”:

On the other hand, he (the abbot) shall be acquitted in so far as he shall have shown all the watchfulness of a shepherd over a restless and disobedient flock: and if as their pastor he shall have employed every care to cure their corrupt manners, he shall be declared guiltless in the Lord’s judgment, and he may say with the prophet, *I have not hidden Thy justice in my heart; I have told Thy truth and Thy salvation; but they contemned and despised me....* When, therefore, any one shall receive the name of abbot, he ought to rule his disciples with a twofold teaching: that is, he should first show them in deeds rather than words all that is good and holy. To such as are understanding, indeed, he may expound the Lord’s behests by words; but to the hard-hearted and to the simple-minded he must manifest the divine precepts in his life. Thus, what he has taught his disciples to be contrary to God’s law, let him show in his own deeds that such things are not to be done, lest preaching to others, *he himself become a cast-away*, and God say unto him thus sinning, *Why dost thou declare My justice, and take my testament in thy mouth? Thou hast hated discipline, and cast My speeches behind thee. And Thou, who didst see the mote in thy brother’s eye, hast thou not seen the beam that is in thine own?*

Later he writes:

The abbot ought ever to bear in mind what he is and what he is called; he ought to know that to whom more is entrusted, from him more is expected. Let him recognize how difficult and how hard a task he has undertaken, to rule souls and to make himself a servant to the humors of many. One, forsooth, must be led by gentle words, another by sharp reprobation, another by persuasion; and thus shall he so shape and adapt himself to the character and intelligence of each, that he not only suffer no loss in the flock entrusted to his care, but may ever rejoice in its good growth. Above all things let him not slight nor make little of the souls committed to his care, heeding more fleeting, worldly and frivolous things; but let him remember always that he has undertaken the government of souls, of which he shall also have to give an account....He should know that whoever undertakes the government of souls must prepare himself to account for them. And however great the number of the brethren under him may be, let him understand for certain that at the Day of Judgment he will have to give to our Lord an account of all their souls as well as of his own. In this way, by fearing the inquiry concerning his flock which the Shepherd will hold, he is solicitous on account of others’ souls as well as of his own, and thus whilst reclaiming other men by his corrections, he frees himself also from all vice. (12)

The most out-dated technology of our world would seem nothing short of fabulous to a man of the sixth century, but despite the (welcome!) technological advances of our modern world, no honest man can deny Benedict’s essentially New Testament interpretation of pastoral care, nor can he show that, in its essence, it is outdated or unnecessary.

THE FORCE

We look now at the force which Jesus explicitly says is the dynamo of sufficient power to produce all pastoral ministry. Some supernatural force is required to produce motive power for a supernatural task! No known machine or machination could ever match the need. We know that because they have all been tried. No actor can fake it. No magician can fabricate it. No conjurer can call it up. That is not to say such people have not tried, and fooled countless multitudes in the process; it is to say that no such frauds can *successfully* perform ministry. All virtues can be faked, but, in the end, the truth will out. We know that Satan himself is able to appear as an angel of light, and produce his own “ministers.” Like Jannes and Jambres, however, because they are fakes, they will, infallibly be found out---“whose end will be according to their works.” (II Corinthians 11: 14-15). What looks like success here may very well be revealed to be abysmal failure on the other side!

Nothing, given His omniscience, ever “occurred” to Jesus; He knew it all from beginning to end. No study on His part is required, being God in the flesh, to determine what His essential message to Simon, and all his pastoral colleagues, will be. It is all---every last aspect, major or minor, massive or minute---contained in that little four-letter English word “love.” But of course the word is weak and one risks the label “mealy-mouthed” in using it in any serious discussion today. Its abuse is notorious: “I love football, I love latte, I love Brit Lit, I love a good fist-fight, I love my new car, I love purple, and I love God!” Yet we continue to use it, in fact, alas, cannot do without it, which is why it is mandatory that we parse the word carefully, especially as it applies to the pastoral ministry. We must stay with the word for all the obvious and admitted reasons, chiefly because Jesus used it Himself (actually, He used two different words which are translated “love,” as we have seen). Even more important is the fact that He, patently, expected us to flesh out the meaning of the word in our personal lives. His command to do so does not represent some sort of “counsel of perfection,” an ethereal ideal unattainable on earth, but calls rather for a consistent emulation of Christ, our saviour and redeemer, but also our example. Peter himself reminds us that Jesus, in His response to His own suffering, was an “example” (*hypogrammos*=a copy book, hence, an example) to us in ours. (I Peter 2:21) To obey His command to love is necessary in an absolute sense; otherwise our ministry is both eviscerated and delegitimized. We need, and have, more than an example---we have the living Christ operating through us, but His service to us as *hypogrammos* is nevertheless an imponderably important aid.

We have already defined the two words: *agapao* means to love altruistically, nobly and in high honor, *phileo*, on the other hand, speaks of friendship, comradeship, likemindedness, etc. Greek scholars, interestingly, demonstrate that the two words seem almost interchangeable in rare settings, but that here (as in many other places) the distinction is, and must be, observed. In fact, although the two words are complementary and not disparate, the subtlety and the depth of this discussion are lost completely without recognizing their varying and significant nuances.

Every pastor must know, at the core of his being, that Jesus desires, indeed, commands, both words to function through us, both in relation to Him and to our sheep. The fact is that the New Testament, in several places,

speaks of our love for Christ and His sheep with both words, *and of His own love for His sheep*. An especially interesting illustration of that comes from the pen of Simon Peter himself: “Whom (referring to Christ) having not seen you love (*agapate*)....” (I Peter 1:8) and: “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren (*philadelphian*), love (*agapesate*) one another fervently with a pure heart...” I Peter 1:22). Apparently, some three decades later, Simon remembered Tiberias!

Note that Jesus does not ask whether Peter fears Him, believes in Him, trusts Him, understands Him, will work diligently for Him, has a skill-set which will be useful in His service, has good connections with notable people in His service, is a sufficiently gifted orator to sway crowds for Him, has sufficient financial stability to leave his business and go on the road for Him, has administrative skills required to direct His work efficiently, will promise to obtain sufficient education to be accepted among his peers if not successful in His assignment as His shepherd, etc.! For the conventionally wise, the list of such requisites for success is readily admitted. We must not, however, assume several things here. First, and foremost, we must not think Jesus was being naive and was not aware of the requisites for successful ministry! (It is amazing that one could imagine such a lack of knowledge on His part, or an oversight on His part; some, however, give explicit vent to such views!) Nor must we assume that Jesus’ lone requirement was commanded because He had no other options; he had more than any of us ever imagined. Further, we should not think Jesus knew nothing of the many leadership skills Peter did possess, or that they were unimportant for Peter’s future assignments, or that Jesus would not use them all. The significant fact, which, at all costs, must not be missed, however, is this: He chose, out of all such qualifications but one, expressed in two Greek words, both translated into that one little insipid English word “love.” Without the foundation of love for Christ, no true success, by heaven’s estimation, can ever occur. All pastoral work is autobiographical, meaning that all the weaknesses and strengths of the individual’s personality will manifest themselves in and through his work. Successful shepherding will inevitably show forth a multiplicity of varieties and levels of talent, ability, and giftedness, all of which are designed to enhance the chief of all gifts, the *God-given* gift of love for Christ. All New Testament students will remember the striking grammar used in Galatians 6:18-23 where the “works” (plural) of the law are contrasted with the “fruit” (singular) of the Spirit. The fragmented secular life will produce fragmented results and the unified Christian life will produce many different kinds of results—the list here include joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control---but they (and all their kin) emanate from, and are produced by, the single and sole fruit of the Spirit---love. *No positive quality ever manifested itself through any Christ-follower which is not an expression of love---His love acting us, to be specific.* How is that for mealy-mouthed!

The love-questions here have to do with love for the Saviour, and not, explicitly, love for His sheep. It must not be forgotten that the specific word *protabia* (from *probation*) is unquestionably a term of endearment of the sheep, but that endearment does not stand at the top of the list of pastoral virtues. Peter is not even asked what he thinks about the sheep. He does not bring the subject up and, it might be argued, had never previously given it a thought. Surely, he loved his brothers in Christ, but we have no hint that he had ever thought about serving them in what we now call (for lack of a more precise term) a “vocational” ministry, in this case, as their pastor.

The response that Jesus was seeking here stands at the top of the hierarchy of pastoral ministry qualifications. Basing his work on any other essential motivation would have produced seriously delimiting if not a crippling effect on Peter, as is true of all his colleagues in ministry. Some will ask, “Honestly, is one’s motive that significant in ministry? Is it not possible that other good and noble motives might suffice?” I am of the long-time opinion that the answer is a simple “no.” Patently, love (whether *agapao* or *phileo*) mutates, waxes and wanes, ebbs and flows. No man is a robot, a statue, or a paper cut-out; the pastor cannot force his heart to love with perfect consistency any more than he can force it to exist in the first place. *It is a God-given gift which must, strangely, must be both accepted and pursued.* The faded ink on one’s ordination papers will not serve the current need! Ordination papers need constant re-signing! All must ever depend on Jesus to love His sheep through us. The one constant motive, the one unfailing basis, and the one sufficient moral force for the pastoral ministry is love for Christ.

One of the most memorable scenes in modern history is dramatically portrayed by T. S. Eliot in his “Murder in the Cathedral,” which is the account of the death of the Anglican Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170. Becket has offended his King, Henry II, and has fled the country. When he chooses to return to England to face the king’s wrath, several temptors place before him four specific temptations not to do so, but rather to flee and save himself for greater service to the Church. In the fourth temptation, his nemesis seeks to convince him that he is actually pursuing martyrdom as an act of pride, “*to make the cause serve him instead of him serving the cause.*” The temptor says to him, in Eliot’s memorable line: “The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason.” It is that possibility that Beckett must consider. He agonizes over the issue and admits that it could be true. After serious reflection, however, he concludes that his motive is pure, i.e., his first and over-riding obligation is to stand for truth without consideration of the cost. Acting on that conviction, he remains in England and is murdered by the king’s men in the Archbishop’s Hall in the cathedral. (13) All things in ministry come down to motive, and the wise man is ever acutely aware of the need to examine, and *re-examine*, his motivations. If they go awry *and are not righted*, ultimately, everything does, and the effect is deadly in time and will produce, infallibly, shattering shame at heaven’s rewards banquet. While praying one Monday morning under my prayer bush, I said to the Lord, a bit plaintively, I am sure, having deposited my brain elsewhere: “Lord, there wasn’t much of a crowd last night.” To which He responded quietly but with keen clarity: “Are you bothered that they did not come to hear you preach, or that they did not come to worship Me?” Motivations!

What love is, then, is one thing, *but foundations precede definitions*, and the specific foundational motivation for pastoral service at Tiberias is love for Jesus. As with all ministry, standing above all other apostolic commands for the pastor is: “AS UNTO THE LORD!” That is the ultimate legitimizer and energizer for ministry.

That knowledge requires that a man, upon entering the pastoral ministry, must consider, not only the basis of his ministry, i.e., the question of motive, but he must needs think, as well, about the end of his ministry, the “pay-off” for ministry. If, early on, he clarifies that issue, he delivers his soul from unbearable burdens and unprepared-for surprises later in life. He may receive money, property, respect, prestige, honor, adulation, freedom from serving under some non-Christian boss in a secular work-place, *and much else*, but he

may not receive any or much of that at all, and---whatever the case--- those “wages” will, he must believe with all his heart, never ultimately satisfy. All humans, inherently and innately, seek significance, and none of the “pay-offs” referenced can possibly fill that our need for cosmic significance. (“Cosmic” sounds overblown; it is, actually, a carefully-chosen word; it is not too much to ask for or seek, since we are all eternal creatures.) Love for Christ, and love for Christ alone, will---he will boast forever---be his chosen portion. And in choosing that portion he will discover that he is a free-man, delivered from the trammels of false expectations, and will know, all the while, that the smile of God, the “well-done, thou good and faithful servant,” will be enough “pay.” (As an aside: is it not some sort of ultimate sadness that our Lord’s “well done” has achieved its current stale status? How can His saying it to us on Judgment Day produce anything but stratospheric ecstasy? If then, why not now?)

One day, early in my pastoral ministry, I was poring over Matthew’s sixth chapter. I discovered that day that the passage holds the sovereign cure for many pastoral diseases in this arena: Jesus tells us there to take care of His business and He will take care of ours. The simplicity of it all leaped off the page to a young pastor with a wife, small children, a long daily commute to seminary in an aged and beat-up car, and who was constantly preoccupied with finances. While studying that text, I discovered that He used the Greek verb merimnao six times, literally, “to split the mind,” but translated by “take no thought” and “do not worry.” If ever a split-minded young man existed, it was the reader of the text that morning. A bit further, I heard Him saying to me, personally---He might as well have called my name: “...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (vs 33). There it stood before me in absurd simplicity! I pored over every word: “Seek,” “first,” “righteousness,” “His,” “all these things,” “shall be,” “added”---each word striking me like a brick-bat in the face. No word was written there which I did not immediately comprehend. Nothing mystical or mythical or metaphysical about any of them. And then this thought: this is either real or it is not; He means what He says or He doesn’t. I immediately got on my knees and, with an humbled heart, I made Him a promise: from that day until the end, I would attempt, by His grace, to take Him at His word. I would attempt to take care of His business if He would take care of mine. I remember saying something like this to Him: “Either You lied or I am a spiritual idiot for worrying as I have, and I think I know the answer!”

But one forgets, of course, and we return to bad spiritual habits, often without realizing it. High blood pressure, the doctors say, is never cured; it is managed. The true spiritual life is not the once-and-for-all attainment of some elevated and unchanging state of nirvana; *it is daily giving as much of me as I know to as much of Him as I know.* That, precisely, is the dynamic which marks every Christian life, and explains why his journey, properly understood, can never become dull. Dorothy Sayers once said, “If your worship is dull and unexciting, Jesus Christ has been left outside; there is no other possible explanation.” A school teacher once asked for a raise, explaining to her principal that, after all, she had twenty-five years experience. The principal quietly responded: “Actually, that is not true; you have had one experience twenty-five times.”

A member of our staff once came to me and asked if there was any way in which he might help me in the press of my duties. I do not wish to sound unchivalrous, but his work-ethic was somewhat less than Hercu-

lean. I expressed appreciation and gave him the assignment of changing the lettering of the weekly message on the church's highway sign. The marquee was located on huge I-beams shaped into three crosses, perhaps fifteen feet high. Several weeks later, he came back to my office and asked to be relieved his newly-assigned task because the weather was turning colder. I put on my overcoat and returned to the task. *Standing under the structure*, I was grumbling in my spirit about having to take time out of a busy schedule to do this mundane task. In the solitude of the moment, on that brisk morning, I heard a voice, in my spirit, asking me, "Who are you doing this for?" I was shaken because I knew, perfectly well, Whose voice it was, and quickly said, in my spirit, "For You, Lord! For You!" He said, "I notice you're not very happy about it, so before we talk further, you might want to move over so none of my blood will fall on your clothes." That was the end of the conversation, but you must believe that---although that occurred four decades ago or so---it is as fresh as if it had happened this morning, and my life has never been the same since. The energizing effect of those few moments is as powerful today as it was the moment I experienced it. God be praised for that brief but telling seminar! *It is possible to see a mountain through a knothole if one is positioned properly!* I was that morning. Positioned properly, that is.

Wordsworth's opening words of his "Character of the Happy Warrior" are: "Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he that every man in arms should wish to be?" He concludes with the following. "It is, finally," he said,

(H)e who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
Forever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead, unprofitable name,
Finds comfort in himself and his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering *draws*
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause--
This is the happy Warrior; this is he
That every man in arms should wish to be.

(Emphasis added)

If the Saviour's applause is all the servant of God hears upon the conclusion of his work, that will suffice! In the understatement of all understatements: if every inhabitant who ever walked on the globe is applauding *except* Him, that affirmation will not satisfy! It is not only Who is applauding, it is for what He is applauding...*and for how long He is applauding!* To compare earth's approval with that of heaven is to compare a sand-box to the Sahara---except that Sahara is finite and heaven is infinite. Do not miss the import of his other sentence: "*(He) finds comfort in himself and his cause...!*" *Where would you be looking for "comfort?"*

It has been said in numberless ways, but Kipling is terse and memorable in his essay "Independence," in which he used one of St. Paul's words: "A man may," he said, "be festooned with the whole haberdashery of success, and go to his grave a castaway." Who can plumb the foolishness of festoonery? Or the catastrophe of becoming a castaway?

Love for Christ is the great panacea (from a non-New Testament Greek word *panakeia*, meaning “all-healing”) for all pastoral challenges, trials, burdens, “failures,” and temptations. That sentence must strike one as impossibly exaggerated, the ultimate hyperbole, in a culture in which psychotherapists are seen as the leading figures of the human healing team, and, thus, for some, the more the better. It is almost impossible for most moderns to conceive that Christ actually had (or rather, was, and is, Himself) the ultimate answer for the labyrinthine pain and puzzlement of the human condition, that He alone could mitigate the toil and trouble of the strange thing called life, and make it both manageable and meaningful. Love for Christ, always remembering that we are speaking of a lifetime of pursuing its redemptive influence, is, however, the Royal Road to victory. That is true even in those lives which do not, consciously and deliberately, make the connection between his ills and love for the Saviour. *Winning athletic teams are performing the fundamentals of their game well whether they know it or not, because otherwise, they would not be winning. Trickery will only get a team so far.* All coaches would argue, however, that--from the beginning--those fundamentals must be understood and must, as well, serve as specific focal points in the training of athletes.

THE SHEPHERD'S CHALLENGES

What issues, one asks, would stand at the head of a list of a pastor’s top challenges/temptations/worries? Through the years, several such polls have been taken, and the results look much the same. In fact, so common are they that no pastor, and certainly, no pastor’s wife or children, will be surprised at the answers!

Humans in all vocations experience many of the same challenges. “No temptation (trial) has overtaken you except such as is common to man...” says the apostle to the Corinthians. Few if any, however, it could be cogently argued--in light of the unique nature of the pastoral task---are as susceptible to them, or as crippled by them, as pastors. The enemy does not want any human to live in victory, but to suppose he does not make special efforts against Christ’s leaders is to cast a slur on his intelligence. Let the neophyte be warned: we do battle against an enemy who has thousands of years experience, who has done hand-to-hand combat with the greatest saints who ever lived—including our Saviour Himself, who has destroyed the redemptive influences of countless Christians, and, while he can be defeated, must never be taken lightly. Our mentor Peter himself wrote, out of existential and personal experience: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Peter 5:8; the word “devour” is picturesque. It is from *katapino* which the Greek lexicon defines as “to swallow greedily, to devour.” It is the modern teenager’s “scarf!”) Peter goes on to state the good news: “Resist him, steadfast in the faith, *knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*” (vs 9)

Tomes could be, and have been, written on each of the pastor’s challenges. We give several of them scant attention here, but the amount of space given to them here in no way correlates to their toxic power over our lives *if not dealt with on the basis of the truths expressed in the Tiberias Tryst, obtained either from that setting or elsewhere.* Many a prince in God’s new Israel has fallen from the effects of a single one of them. That is not, be it explicitly stated, all the information the pastor needs; it is explicitly to state, however, that unless

he digests the foundational principles revealed at Tiberias, all other informational structures, no matter how vast and deep, simply will not prepare him for the Christian pastorate

A caveat: none of that is to propagate that most fearful of all doctrines for theological liberals, the doctrine of triumphalism, of chest-thumping, thirty-second sound-bytes of Bible-quoting arrogance guaranteeing easy answers for life's profoundest conundrums; it is to say, without apology, that Jesus Christ not only has the answers, but is the answer, and loving and serving Him gives us the best hope of a life well-lived in emotional and spiritual health. The confession is forced upon us by two thousand years of Christian history. Men and women, following Him in love and service to Him and His, have lived victoriously long before such a thing as "psychotherapy" was known. That is not to criticize solid and sound biblical counseling; it is to commend serious Bible study and the ultimate therapy of Christ taking up residence and ruling in the human heart.

I had been a Christian for about a year, and had surrendered to God's call to the pastorate when the man who introduced me to Christ visited my university campus. During our time together, he asked me a question, "Bill, when the Lord saved you, what part of you did He save?" I told him what I had heard every Sunday since being saved, an answer I knew by rote, but the answer modified itself as it came out of my mouth: "He saved my soul," I said, and then, "but I guess He wants to save every part of me: mind, soul, body, spirit, influence, and everything else." "Yes," he said, "and you must never forget that fact."

LONELINESS

Loneliness, in all its varied forms, is especially germane to pastoral work. To begin with, there is the loneliness experienced by all humans. To be human is to be lonely at times. The ancients had a phrase, *lacrimae rerum*, "the tears of things," which Wordsworth spoke of as 'the still, sad music of humanity' ---the universal human condition. Beyond that universal *angst*, produced by simply being alive, there is the loneliness of ill health, of financial burdens, of injustices, of social ostracism, of lack of opportunity, of betrayal, of old age and "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." Beyond all that, however, and especially poignant for the pastor, are the lonelinesses, either in themselves or in their intensity, peculiar to his unique role. There is the loneliness of leadership. No one who is not a pastor himself can ever understand the solitariness of the pastor's leadership role. Nietzsche once said "the air is rarified at the top," and the pastor experiences that thin air often. Much of his study is alone, as is his praying. There is the loneliness of his agony over his own spiritual failures, his grief for his straying or wounded sheep, the defection of some of them, the lack of a positive response to his message by others, the murmuring ---or shouting---critics of his best efforts, the search for direction for his congregation, even the lack of understanding---all too often---of his own mate, not to mention the loneliness of his sense of (and reality of!) his cosmic responsibility. It is not to exaggerate, if we believe God's word, to say that the eternal destiny of human beings is daily on his mind and heart. At times he realizes the awful fact that he and he alone may well be the sole barrier between a fellow human and eternal hell. He will be buoyed up by the joys of many relationships, but he will infallibly live at times with a profound loneliness.

It is precisely here where his personal and intimate devotion to his Lord comes into play. *The Chief Shepherd knows the loneliness of the undershepherd!* Because of Him we may be alone but need never be lonely. Christ's chief business is not to cure our loneliness, but that inevitability is seriously ameliorated by one's relationship to Him, *and apart from which loneliness will rule us. There simply is no other effective antidote.* Further, that cure will work wonders for peripheral issues which, may never be defined as expressions of loneliness, but are.

MARITAL PRESSURES

Pastoral families move under a special blessing from God, but that fact does not guarantee marital bliss. Pastoral families come under the stresses which all families endure and, because of the unique pressures of the vocation, those stresses are exacerbated. Not always, but often; in fact, the exceptions demonstrate the rule. Expectations are high, both on the part of the couple themselves, and *always* by both Christians and non-Christians. It is not highly unusual that a pastor's wife will, for whatever reason, find it unbearable to live under the pressure of her husband's work. That pressure may, at times, be attributable to the pastor's own warped sense of the call, or his interpretation of it. Unattainable expectations fall on the children of the pastoral family as well. (A pastor noted recently that his child was severely criticized for chewing gum during a worship service.) Add to that the fact that most congregations are approximately two-thirds female, with the pastor often being forced to work closely with them. Further, the pastorate is especially time-consuming, and time management is always a challenge. Many pastors would label time management as their most challenging task. In a sense, the pastor is always on call. Even on vacation, how does he simply turn off his call to minister? Such time constraints are often deleterious to a healthy marriage. The pastor, as a public figure whose compelling concern is the well-being of all he comes in contact with, often becomes a target for frustrated women. Add the almost inevitable financial stresses of vocational ministry, and the virulent mix often produces unbearable stress on the pastor's family. If that were not the case, the problem would not show up as one of the most common stresses for pastoral families on every survey ever taken on the subject!

In that light, it is imperative that the pastor sets clear priorities, priorities that give balance to his life, which provide protective boundaries for him and his family, and to which he remains true in the maelstrom of ministry needs that swirl about him. The wise pastor abides by three irrefragible priorities: (1) His own personal relationship to Jesus. If he fails there, his life, not to mention his marriage, will inevitably disintegrate. That fact is as inviolable as the law of gravity. (2) His relationship to his family. The New Testament clearly states that if a man does not manage his family well, he is disqualified from even serving as a pastor. A bishop (pastor), Paul says, must be one "who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence, for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (I Timothy 3:4-5; our English word "rule" is misleading here; the word used does, indeed, speak of expressing a measure of authority, but it is from the verb *proistemi* which literally means to "stand before" or "to be placed before" others; it has much more the sense of leading than does our "ruling.") Paul's

word is not a “counsel of perfection,” but commands a special care by the pastor for his family. His word is notoriously passed over in much modern discussion about ministry.

I was once challenged, in a pastor’s conference, by an excellent young pastor friend of mine, who stood and asked me in the Q&A session, “But, isn’t that putting your family before your ministry?” I asked, in return, “If your family is not a ministry to you, precisely what is it?” And then I observed that Paul’s statement is clear and its meaning undeniable. *In the end, the pastor has his family and his Lord, and nobody else!* If he does not give those two relationships top priority, he is not courting disaster, he is in avid pursuit of it, and may find himself quoting one of the most lamentable sentences in the Bible: “They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept.” (Song of Solomon, 1:6) (3) His third priority is his vocational ministry. All else is dictated by his dogged adherence to his first three priorities.

Another aspect relative to the pursuit of sexual integrity is an acknowledgement that humans are sexual beings, and, obviously, ordination, or involvement in Christian ministry, does not eradicate that fact. Psychologists have long observed that religious instincts somehow have a close affinity with sexual ones. It is folly to either deny the reality of the sexual drive, to attempt to evade its force by engaging in some sort of aberrant compensatory behaviour, or to sublimate it by opting for emotionally damaging alternatives. An insidious danger which faces all human beings is to become emotionally involved with others and to either encourage it or allow it since it does not involve physical contact. All humans need food of various kinds every day: physical food, mental food, spiritual food, and emotional food. Let a man, as he heads off to engage in the day’s activities, ask himself precisely where he anticipates being fed emotionally that day. An honest answer to that question, and the proper response to it, will go far toward producing integrity, in its many expressions, especially in relationships with women. To give one’s self a pass by saying, “nothing has really happened,” meaning that no physical sexual contact has occurred, is a lie; indeed, “something” extremely dangerous and totally unacceptable has happened, as every wife will testify. That includes all forms of pornography which according to Jesus is adultery: “I say unto you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed---note the past tense---adultery with her in his heart”. (Matthew 5:28) In saying that, He is, again, agreeing with that unerring resident expert on such things---a wife. The biblical view is that proper and acceptable sexual activity is whatever three consenting adults in the marriage relationship agree to---a believing husband, his believing wife, and the Lord Jesus.

Sooner or later it must become evident: you and I are what we are in private, when nobody else is looking. There is, I conceive, only one true ethical crisis in a human life: it is the moment when a child discovers that his mother and father cannot read his mind, and that he can say whatever he wishes knowing nobody can prove him wrong except, perhaps, his victimized sibling, who can easily be shouted down. Alas, history---all of it---is replete with evidence that many, if not most, live out the perceptions gained in that tectonic ethical moment for the remainder of their lives, and they do so on the wrong side of moral behaviour. Cures of some value are available for the condition, but the sovereign cure is the knowledge gained by Peter at Tiberias, proven by his “*Lord, you know everything.*” That is not Pollyanish prattle, but an expression of sane and sober reality. It is, as well, why Rodney Stark can argue in his *For The Glory of God* that the Judeo-Chris-

tian God is the only deity who has the power to truly civilize a human being. *He is, after all, the only Being Who ever existed of Whom Peter's statement can truthfully be said! No other god sees us, or ever has seen us, or ever will see us!* Words are simply incapable of stating the moral and ethical import of that fact.

INSECURITY

All temptations are at least first-cousins to each other and it could be argued that every type of insecurity is a form of loneliness. That does not diminish its death-dealing power. All humans experience insecurities relating to health, the inability to engage in gainful employment, the defection of friends, the death of friends and loved ones, aging, our own mortality, etc. For us, there is, often, the insecurity produced by maltreatment by the church---either of us or our loved ones, the financial strain produced by what is often a meager salary, the knowledge that the church can ask for (read “demand”) our resignation any time they feel so inclined, and the ineluctable fact that, one day, we will be deemed too old to deserve a hearing. A church whose pastoral search committee once spoke to me about serving as their pastor had a rule that they would not call a pastor over thirty-years of age. I was only twenty-seven or so, but even at that tender age, I was aware that they were victimized by some sort of idiocy to have instituted such a rule. Every pastor, of whatever age, preferably before he takes on his first pastorate, must tell himself: *I know and accept the fact that the only security in my life is to know that there is no security--except in Christ Himself!* In a very memorable prayer experience, when, well beyond middle age, I was telling the Lord how thankful I was that He had so miraculously provided for our family, and that---having been reared in conditions that were very limited financially-- I counted (and do count) myself wealthy. I also told Him, however, that I was aware that there was but a tiny gap between me and poverty. He quietly said, “That is true; but I am in the gap.”

Consider this phenomenon: perhaps in no other vocation on earth is there so little connection between a man’s demonstrated ability and his financial remuneration as the pastorate.

Here again, immense comfort attends the voice of One who was---though full deity in the flesh---no more and no less dependent on the Father for security than we are. A living relationship with Him, with no condemnation of conscience, is of immeasurable value. Being at peace with God and possessing the peace of God, is a “natural” and predictable result of a close affinity with the Saviour.

Perhaps this word is appropriate here: often, the very sensitivity which enabled us to hear God’s voice in His call to ministry is, at times, the source of various insecurities. Spurgeon has a chapter in his *Lectures To My Students* entitled, “The Minister’s Fainting Fits,” referring to such timidity. He writes: “Many of the best of ministers, from the very spirituality of their character, are exceedingly sensitive---too sensitive for such a world as this. ‘A kick that scarce would move a horse would kill a sound divine.’” (14)

The ultimate solution, however, begins with the fact that no Christian has anything to prove, only the

Saviour to please. Spurgeon's word was: "Your Father's smile will make you forget your brother's frown." The personal knowledge of that smile, however, can only come from sweet and continual communion with Jesus. The man who waits at the church door for applause for his sermon, and lives on the emotional lift of that affirmation, must understand the danger of his Adamic instinct which produces that act. He must see that he is suffering from a species of spiritual aberration, may well be involved in some form of spiritual adultery, and that his act borders on blasphemy, valuing the applause of man over that of God. To every man's "own master he stands or falls," Paul says, then adds, "Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4) Elsewhere, on the same theme, Paul says that he is not bothered by the judgment of others, in fact, does not even trust his own judgment of himself, but waits for that of the Lord. Again, he promises victory in that setting: "Then each one's praise will come from God." (I Corinthians 4:4-5). Our Lord, Himself said, "I always do those things which please God (John 8:29), and it is unthinkable that He ever sought the applause of men. In fact, He said plainly, "I do not receive honor from men" (John 5:41), and then solemnly castigates honor-seekers among men: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44) Such a hankering after honor, He says here, is a patent denial of true belief; His godly followers imitate Him in that regard, not standing before the Lord when He comes and hearing Him say something like this: "Before we begin, would you mind giving back to Me what you have consistently stolen from Me—My honor!"

Compliments to the man of God will certainly come and he will have sufficient common sense not to deprecate such affirmations, playing the curmudgeon by belittling in any way those who express them. In fact, he will thank God for the confidence His people have in him, which confidence he will see as one of heaven's kindest gifts. The wise man knows that he can no more force it any more than he can force the sun to rise in the west, and therefore does not waste energy attempting to evoke it, but receives it kindly as and when it comes. He further understands that, when God does give him that gift through his flock, the journey is immeasurably sweeter, and he will be careful not to abuse it. I need not remind any experienced pastor, but no pastor should be saddened by the knowledge that such affirmation is often to be taken sweetly but with a grain of salt as well. One Sunday, as I greeted departing parishioners at the door, an elderly woman raved about my sermon that morning---a morning on which a visiting missionary had preached, not me. Perhaps she found my announcement of the upcoming deacons' meeting scintillating, and found it impossible to restrain herself!

LIVING THE "FISH-BOWL" LIFE

Just this morning, while breakfasting with a young pastor I am mentoring, I asked him, "What would you say is the most bothersome aspect of the pastoral ministry?" After clarifying my question, he immediately said, "The Fish-Bowl Life!" His answer is one of the most common among pastoral families.

Some men and/or their wives find it almost unbearable to live under the close scrutiny of others. Those strange television shows based on such constant surveillance have notoriously fizzled. For all pastors, close

and continual scrutiny is guaranteed, welcomed or not. Many have either refused to enter the ministry, or left it, under such pressure. The reality is that, infallibly, Christian leaders and their families are under constant surveillance and unreasonable expectations are superimposed on them which are unattainable by the holiest of lives. I am not suggesting that such surveillance is always malicious; I am explicitly stating that it exists and even if innocent, is worrisome at times. Sadly, some few church members believe the entire pastoral family, along with their time and possessions, belong to them personally.

All normal people need some measure of privacy and the erratic behaviour of the most truly famous people of our culture must surely be some sort of evidence of that fact. Every pastoral family simply has to work out solutions which fit their personalities, both personal and familial. Boundaries must be set and adhered to. I had almost a fetish, early on in the ministry, to the effect that every phone call at home had to be answered and answered immediately. Part of that had to do my fear that any evasive action or words would teach our children to lie, hearing something like: "Well, he's not available just now," while I was sitting by reading, watching television, eating with the family, or whatever. One day my wife came running into the room, pointing to a passage in a book written by a minister who was saying (she clearly vocalized to me!) that by no means should pastoral family times be disrupted to take phone calls---that every family needed time-outs from the press of the public. In a sincere attempt to promote domestic tranquility, I took the man's advice and altered my behaviour.

About the place where you live and serve:

1. No place of ministry on earth is perfect. If it were, you would not be needed there, anyway. Perfection awaits heaven.
2. Stay focused on God's precise assignment and allow nothing to deter you in that pursuit.
3. Recall all those who thought God had lost sight of them but discovered later their "detour" was an important segment of His itinerary: Paul attempting to minister in Asia Major and God sending him to Asia Minor—and the gospel message going from there to Europe from whence it came to north America! (Acts 16:6f), Paul on Malta (Acts 28), the many interruptions in the life of our Lord which served as rewarding opportunities for ministry (Luke 8:43f, Mark 2:1f, Mark 7:24f, etc.), and a thousand testimonies of current disciples of our Lord who, in certain situations, were sure God must have abandoned them only to thank Him later for His guidance to that very "abandoned" place.
4. Ponder this: the quickest way to get God's transfer to another mission station is to handle the present one properly.
5. Remember Anderson's Axiom #44: "The most difficult place on earth in which to serve Jesus is---right where you are." And that will be the case in the next place where you serve Him.

6. Think this: if our walk is a warfare (Ephesians 6:11-18, Acts 14:21-23, etc.) why do we expect peace?
7. Consider the fact that Paul, when defending his apostleship to the Corinthians, and listing the signs of an apostle which he demonstrated among them, put *patience* at the top of the list! (II Corinthians 12:12, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance (*hypomone*=forebearance, patience)”) then he adds “in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” Coolness under fire came before the divine fireworks!
8. Our difficulties serve as a keen reminder for us to pray for brothers and sisters around the globe who face persecution and sometimes death in their place of service.
9. “TO THE LIFE THAT HAS SEIZED ON CONTENT, GEOGRAPHY SEEMS BUT ACCIDENT.”
10. The “content” takes us back to our home-base: it is, essentially, not the work itself, but a personal, enduring, intimate, fulfilling relationship with the Lord Jesus whose servant you are wherever you are!

JEALOUSY

One of the most nettlesome of challenges for some men in Christ’s ministry is that of being jealous of the stature or abilities or preferments or stations of his compeers. Especially is that true when the enemy provides us with our inevitable defenders who assure us that if justice prevailed we would be enthroned, and not the other man. If other trials of the heart have slain their thousands, jealousy has slain its ten thousands. The malady will almost always be obvious to the truly godly sheep, but may lurk largely unseen in the deepest recesses of our own psyches where we keep it hid, ashamed that others might observe it. Even so, its poison is pernicious. As to the kinship of emotional diseases, jealousy lives next door to what might be the most debilitating of all such diseases—self-pity, a condition a pastoral friend of mine says *melts the spine!*

The man of God who senses it lurking in his breast will save himself an immense amount of time (not to mention years of emotional pain and, very likely, physical illnesses of various sorts) by envisioning himself in Christ’s presence and hearing the Lord Jesus ask a question, stunning in its simplicity but powerful in its poignancy: (always remembering that the divine Physician knows where to probe): “Do you love Me the less because of the lot which I have chosen for you?”

All this is why it is important that the man of God be brutally honest with himself about himself in the presence of Jesus. It is a hugely important spiritual principle: no problem has been dealt with properly until it has been dealt with honestly in the presence of Jesus. Do you think He does not know how you feel about things? Why not

go ahead and tell Him how He has consistently failed you. How you cannot understand why your name is not in lights. How the preferred congregation has been denied you. How men do not recognize your genius. How the other man's congregation flourishes while yours dwindle. How He has made you miserable in assigning you to your low estate. How He gave you the wife He did. And her children! Perhaps it is here where we ought to be reminded: the main study of the man of God, following the heart of the Saviour, is his own heart. Such a study requires a rare honesty, but is absolutely vital to an acquisition (to the extent that it can be "acquired") of the favor of God. *In reality, the capacity to know one's heart and keep it right before God is, in itself, one of the His highest favors to His children.* Some will read that as a plea for a sad-and-sodden slog through a joyless life until one falls off into an unmarked grave, "unwept, unhonored, and unsung." It is nothing of the kind. *It is, however, an explicit plea never to get you and God mixed up!* Is it possible for there to exist a more lamentable human being than a proud clergyman? It would be comedic if it were not so catastrophic. (I cannot resist telling you about a friend of mine who said he once heard of a pastor who hugged himself to death.)

Every pastor of much experience remembers times when, in a marriage-counseling setting--let us say--he asks either the man or the woman to be very precise about what it is that is so troubling about the other, what it is that has caused the communication impasse between them, perhaps even a decision to end the marriage. During the answer, at some point, in defining the "defining" event, the voice trails off and ends with a quiet, brow-furrowed, head-bowed, "When I put it into words, it all sounds so... *silly*." The wise pastor will not interrupt until a sliver of silence has reached the citadel of the heart and, therein, performed its miracle. So it is with our conversations about jealousy with the Lord, our first and final love! In discussing the matter with Him, do not be surprised if your voice fails after a bit! There is health, however, maybe saving health, in pursuing the exercise. Why should your mouth never say to the Saviour what your heart has been shouting to you for decades? *If you are angry, you are angry ultimately at God Who could have solved the anger-producing event!* Several tomes would not exhaust the horror of pastoral jealousy, and nothing in the universe demagnifies a man so utterly and thoroughly, proving him to be a true miniature of the real thing, as jealousy of his brother.

Again, Tiberias' answer is forever relevant!

LOSS OF VISION

It is not difficult to start out in ministry when one is young, full of youthful vigor, flush with great plans for the redemption of the world, with crowds of well-wishers lined up to assure him that God is fortunate to have a man of his caliber in His work. It is altogether a different thing when the years, and the enemy and his friends have done their damage, taking a drastic toll on a man's energies, spiritual, mental, and physical. The candle burns low, the Jordan swells, and muscle and nerve and sinew slacken. The well-wishers are gone, the flags hang at half-mast if at all, "the captains and the kings" have departed, and a man sits with his broken sword in his hand, head bowed, bone-weary of it all. The enemy's whispers enter into his soul: "Is it

really worth the struggle?" "Why go on?" "Why not throw in the towel?" "*What possible difference could it make?*"

All that and more (I did not mention denominational politics!) present a crisis of the first order for God's man. God be thanked that such is not the biography of all pastors, but the image is, alas, only too accurate of many.

Patently, some men leave the ministry for legitimate reasons, and no man should be criticized for doing so under the mandate of God. Again, "To his own master (the servant) stands or falls," and we are no man's master. Others have a "diminished" ministry, at least in appearance; that, too, is a matter between the servant and his Lord, and no one else. "Retirement" from the ministry never comes; the work is simply transmuted to match age and health and circumstance. Our focus here, however, is on the man who has given up in the battle *but who has not left the battlefield*. He continues to don his armor, salutes his commander, meets with his regiment, shuffles about the battlefield, but is dead in his boots because he is dead in his heart. He has not resigned, but he has *become* resigned---resigned to a listless prayer life, a sloppy study life, questionable ethics, slipshod shepherding, a foggy notion as to where the battle is---indeed, even what the battle is really about---to living at ease devoid of a fresh word from heaven. His doleful dirge is "Visions I no longer see; smoke is only smoke to me." What is he to do?

Considering Peter's life journey, particularly that portion of which precedes Tiberias, will help here. He had been a disciple of John (John 1:35-37), and was brought to Jesus by Andrew (John 1:42). Remarkably, at that moment Jesus said to Peter, "...thou art Simon the son of Jonah ("Joanes," John, Jonas, or Jonah): thou shalt be called Cephas," which is, John adds, "by interpretation Peter," meaning "a rock" or "a stone" in Peter's native Aramaic, all of which points to Jesus' knowledge (see Matthew 16:18) that Peter will later play a significant role in His work.

A.T. Robertson says that, though Peter was now a disciple of Jesus, a bit later he, along with Andrew, James, and John, actually leaves his fishing occupation and follows Jesus full-time. (15). Luke records (Luke 5:1-11) that, at that time, they were casting their fishing nets into this same sea and, though, again, they had fished all night but had caught nothing. Jesus tells Peter to throw the net into the sea again. He does so, despite their fishing futility, saying his memorable "*nevertheless* at Your word I will let down the nets." (Note the relationship of the wills of the two men; Jesus wills one thing, Peter another; Peter chooses to submit to Jesus' will.) So many fish were caught that the net "was breaking." Both boats are filled, and both begin to sink. All are astonished and Peter, upon seeing the miracle, falls on his knees confessing to Jesus that he is a sinful man. Jesus says to Peter, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men," and Luke adds: "So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."

Our Tiberias experience occurs, perhaps at the very same spot on its shores, *some five years later*, the first being in the summer or autumn of A.D. 27 (so Robertson, p. 30) and ours in A. D. 33. In those five years Peter's spiritual understanding had apparently expanded exponentially, but now a truly defining moment

occurs: will he or will he not take the next crucial step in his commitment to Jesus and His cause? Jesus makes no reference to Peter being a rock, surely a kindness the Saviour extended to Peter who had so recently demonstrated something less than adamantine behavior!

Tiberias, however, offers us a clear indication of Peter's spiritual growth during those years: having had a taste of what a walk with Jesus meant, having gone through boot camp, having been in "pastoral residency," surely aware that dark clouds were now ominously gathering about his Lord, Peter sells out to Jesus and His cause. Peter is not perfect; although a "saint" he does not always act in a saintly manner any more than modern saints do. Though being the obvious leader of the disciples, he had provably stumbled several times before Tiberias (in the "get behind Me, Satan..." episode, in his taking up the sword against Jesus' enemies and hacking off the ear of the servant of the high priest, in his famous denials, etc.), and is to do so later. He acted the consummate hypocrite in eating with gentile believers in Syria and then walking out on them upon the arrival of more conservative Jewish Christians from Jerusalem(Galatians 2:11). Paul severely, and justifiably, rebuked him publicly for his "dissembling." To Peter's credit, as well as to Paul's, however, there is no evidence that the experience had any negative effect on their personal relationship, or in any way harmed the ministry of the Lord. (Peter is later to refer to him as "our beloved brother Paul," II Peter 3:15.) Again, and to our point, Peter perseveres, not only through this clash of wills but through suffering of various sorts, eventually dying for the cause of Christ, without ever losing his vision and passion in the pursuit of Jesus' work. No one will be surprised to hear in heaven that such perseverance was due largely to the Tiberias experience, and to the moment there when he decided to surrender to Christ and to make a lifetime commitment to Him and His sheep.

PART TWO: THE PASTOR'S SECOND COUNSELOR

We have pointed out the obvious: the wise pastor is counseled by innumerable ways and means and people. He is a life-long learner and never ceases to add more mentors to his entourage, whether such new mentors--as would be true in a majority of cases--were aware of it or not. No thinking person would challenge his choice of his first and final and forever Counselor, the Lord Jesus. All knowledgeable congregations would rejoice to know that their pastor had, with a heartfelt intention, made such a choice! All Christians immediately acknowledge our Lord's mentoring genius (with the understanding that full deity is more than genius!) expressed in the Tiberias event. Our own comments on the event are, in classic understatement, suggestive and not exhaustive. No thoughtful man would ever be so foolish as to claim to have exhausted a single sentence Jesus said. A bishop once said that he knew God better than God knew Himself, which means--if the creature was serious--that not all deranged people are institutionalized. Add to that John's thoroughly intriguing statement that if all the things that Jesus did and said were written, the world could not contain the books--a sentiment that can not be imagined as having been said about any other person who ever lived. We are not through with Jesus at Tiberias and never well be, and with that caveat, we turn now to focus on the pastor's second mentor. A library could well be created on the implications of Jesus' counsel to His first pastor at Tiberias, *a pastor whom we shall nominate as our second mentor.*

The scripture tells us that we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, “but was in all points tempted (*peiradzo*=the infinitive form is to try, to tempt, to test, to challenge, to put to trial, etc.) as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) Every pastor is blessed in having his own Saviour as his Mentor, but the thought will certainly have occurred to him that if Jesus is divine, he, the pastor, is assuredly not, and that he needs counsel from others who are men “ subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17, KJV).

I am suggesting that we choose Simon Peter, son of Jonas, as our second mentor. To do so is not, patently, to limit ourselves to him, and would seem arbitrary unless it be remembered that, after all, Simon is the first New Testament disciple to be set aside specifically to the pastorate, *as far as we know*, and that Jesus was obviously calling him into the shepherd’s task at Tiberias. He is also the only *named* person in the New Testament who labels himself an elder (actually, a “co-elder,” *sumpresbuteros*, I Peter 5:1). John does refer to himself as a *presbuteros* (elder) twice, in II John 1 and III John 1, but the word may refer only to his advanced age when he wrote the epistles. Paul also calls himself a *presbutes* (Philemon 9), but all commentators indicate that he was speaking of his age, as the context clearly shows. In more than fifty passages elders are referenced as serving the New Testament churches, almost certainly including “pastoral” ministries, if not playing the precise same role as Simon, but all are nameless.

In any case, no one would deny that Peter makes for a fruitful study for Christians of all ages, and especially for pastors. His career can only be characterized as remarkable, and the study of his life offers modern believers rich insights into what a committed and all-too human follower of Christ looks like.

The character of Peter is one of the more vividly drawn and charming in the NT. His sheer humanness has made him one of the most beloved and winsome members of the apostolic band. He was eager, impulsive, energetic, self-confident, aggressive, and daring, but also unstable, fickle, weak, and cowardly. He was guided more by quick impulse than logical reasoning, and readily swayed from one extreme to the other. He was preeminently a man of action. His story exhibits the defects of his qualities as well as the tremendous capacities for good which he possessed. He was naturally forward and often rash, liable to instability and inconsistency, but his love for and associations with Christ moulded him into a man of stability, humility, and courageous service for God, becoming one of the noble pillars (Gal. 2:9) of the Church. (16)

All young pastors would do well to choose a historical figure, other than our first study, the Lord Jesus Himself, and master that man or woman’s life-story. One could do worse than choose Simon Peter, especially if he is a pastor.

Our interest here is the degree to which Peter responded to his Mentor, again, using the Tiberias seminar as our starting point. Did he “get it” or not? And what has he to say to us today about the pastoral role? The following, and much, much else, indicates that his response to his own Mentor was positive, and that he is therefore more than fit for our study and emulation. Apparently the Lord thought Peter was an apt student in view of the way the mentoring session ended, *and that fact serves as our strongest motive for seeking a men-*

toring relationship to Simon Peter, son of Jonas.

PETER RETURNS TO THE BATTLE.

As occurs to all students of the Bible, I had an unforgettable “Eureka!” moment several years ago when reading the gospel passages reporting the resurrection and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. While reading John 21, I heard myself blurting out, “Peter is back in the ball game!” I was shocked at the irony of it all: Peter has just blown it, he had just become famous---as he will be forever---for having crumbled under pressure, had wept at his egregious cowardice and slipped away under cover of darkness, *but now he is back on the front line again!* We cannot know the precise time-lapse between his sin and Tiberias, but it could not have been lengthy, because the Lord’s ascension, as we know, occurred only forty days following His resurrection. We do know that Peter had already met with Jesus on resurrection Sunday, but nothing of the precise conversation which transpired between them. We cannot be faulted for surmising that the subject of Peter’s sin was thoroughly dealt with. (One can only stop for a moment and wish for the entire transcript of the conversation, not in order to embarrass Peter, but to watch the Master redeem one of His disciples who had so dismally failed Him, and a man who reminds us so much of ourselves! What priceless instruction for all of us who receive His forgiving grace in our own brokenness, and who assist others in the same process!) The Tiberias conversation, however, proves there was still more work to be done with the forgiven man.

Whatever the case, the shocking fact is that he is here at Tiberias with his comrades, which is so obvious a thing we are liable to miss the surprise factor in it. Yes, he went back home, but in doing so, he could not have thought he could evade either his colleagues or the Lord. He knew, assuredly, he would be forced to endure the pain of seeing his fishermen buddies and knew, as well, that Jesus would---as He had promised---return to Galilee and inevitably come face to face with him. One of the infallible measures of the true character of a man is his capacity to face up to his faults, his follies, his moral failures, to “play the man” (*andridzesthe*) as Paul says in that powerful one-word sermon recorded in I Corinthians 16:13, in modern terminology, to “man up!”

It is here, to begin with, where Peter is an excellent mentor to his fellow pastors, not to mention every other Christian on earth! Apparently , he does not deny his sin, he does not ameliorate it in any way, he does not blame others for causing it, he does not plead his weak humanity, he does not sink into either real or faked depression, he does not take his life as had another disciple in response to his sin and resultant guilt, he did not run away into the endless desert. He simply faces up to reality---“*Mea culpa!*” he says---“I have sinned!”

PETER RETURNS TO THE BATTLE QUICKLY

Again, the time-frame is short between his sin and his return to the battle front. He rejoins his regiment immediately. What we are watching is the principle of “spiritual rebound” in operation. Every great athlete

has failed at times. It is simply impossible not to do so. No baseball player bats a thousand. No tennis player is insulated against “unforced errors.” No football quarterback lives without the dreaded interception. The great ones, however, in every vocation known to man, are marked by the rapidity with which they put their failures behind them and refocus on the immediate context of the game. They know to fail is not to become a failure---unless the failure continues to mentally and emotionally dominate them. The great ones go down but they do not stay down. The best ones get back in the game instantaneously, as if by second nature. Athletes who do not practice the “rebound” principle find themselves on the bench, or in the stands, but not in the game. How different the lives of believers, indeed, the entire history of Christendom, would be if all Christ-followers became Peter-followers in that regard. He has taught us well. *Nobody wins but the enemy when a believer delays his repentance.*

It will benefit us to observe here that much of our hesitancy to face up to our failures is nothing more than pride. Assuredly, Peter was here a victim of his pride, and being a normal human, he had to be pained by it. If so, he gains victory over his egocentrism, however, in a short span of time. The essential reason for so many having gone AWOL in Kingdom work is that pride, the famed Greek *hubris*, has done its work. *Peter might never have thought, specifically, about pride and/or humility, but at Tiberias he puts aside the one and practices the other.* And in that regard is an effective mentor to all who, like him, wish to serve the Lord effectively.

Peter knew, as we all do, that there is no permanent cure for pride. There is no single moment when it is done with forever once and for all, never to appear again. He writes something, however, approximately thirty years later, which gives evidence that he is still freshly aware of the importance of believers living out the grace of humility in a humility-heavy passage: “...(B)e clothed (literally “be wrapped”, “be girded”) with *humility*, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore *humble* yourselves under the mighty hand of God...” (I Peter 5:5-6)

The problem with pride is that it is so insidious. Who could have faulted Peter for excusing himself from battle with something like “I am so terribly unworthy, I am such a dismal failure, how could the Lord want me in his platoon?” The enemy may have tempted him to say it if his own flesh, without help from below, did not. Any honest human would have recognized such a sentiment, however, as a weakness produced by face-saving pride. Spurgeon once said, “Don’t chide yourself for thinking you are nothing; that is precisely what you are!” And there is Golda Meir’s response to false humility: “Don’t be so humble; you’re not that good.”

Many diseases give warnings before attacking us, but pride is often full-blown before the victim senses its presence. A man may preach twelve sermons on pride, and then be proud of his messages! He may, as one pastor confessed, become proud of his own humility. Nothing is as ludicrous as a clergyman who preaches God’s everlasting and amazing grace and swaggers while preaching it! Winston Churchill was, following his heroics in World War II, surprisingly defeated by Clement Attlee for the role of Prime Minister of England. A friend praised Attlee as being a modest man. “Well, yes,” said Churchill famously, “but then he has so much to be modest about, doesn’t he?” Mr. Attlee aside, let every born-again human be aware of how true modesty perfectly befits us, having heard the apostolic question, and being certain of the answer: “And

what do you have that you did not receive? (I Corinthians 4:7) “*True* modesty?” Yes, true modesty. There is Coleridge’s “pride that apes humility,” Dickens’ Uriah Heap, one of his most arrogant characters whose mantra was that he was “a very ‘umble man,” and Shakespeare’s brilliant---and fearful-- portrait of pride:

But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he’s most assured
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

The Bible has a hundred proscriptions against pride, any one of which outweighs all secular references; a single and solemn sentence from the hand of our pastor mentor will suffice: “...*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” (I Peter 5:5; the word “resist” is from *antitasso*, “to post in adverse array,” “to set one’s self in opposition”, “to be averse”.) It is to be seriously pondered: to have God standing against us is to be in a perilous state. It is to be seriously pondered, as well, that God does not always *publicly* announce His aversion to our pride, so woe betide the man who is secretly prideful and thinks he is “getting away” with something! He imitates the man who stole a clock one night which, as he ran down an alley with it, began to chime. His solution? He stuffed cotton in his ears and kept running!

But, it is not God alone who hears the clock chiming. The godly folk will recognize pride in its earliest forms in him. No cosmetic can camouflage it, and it is impervious to all cures except that which Peter experienced at Tiberias---the living presence of the Lord Jesus. The Old Testament people of God operated under the principle that “the fire must ever be burning on the altar.” (Leviticus 6:13, KJV) That permanent fire spoke of the corporate spiritual vitality of the nation. The new people of God operate on the same basis---the fire of personal devotion--- and it, as well, must ever be burning on the altar. *Burning!* Fire, as every Bible student is aware, is often used in both testaments to express the presence of the living God. Our forebears in the faith believed that nothing on earth so imitated life as fire; it was the single thing in the inanimate world that most simulated something alive. Remaining in constant and intimate communion with the Lord is the one effective antidote for pride. However, even in the prayer closet, alas, the enemy will persistently attempt to invade the heart through a secret door. The simpleton makes little of such things; the wise man *foresees* the inevitability (the operative word!) of the crippling effects of pride before he has any sense of the level of its virulence in his emotional and mental and spiritual systems. Nothing will destroy the pastor’s effectiveness sooner or more completely than pride. The battle with pride is literally a life and death conflict; it will end when our life ends, and not until. Peter’s immediate and redemptive heart-surrender to Christ illustrates, for all time, the only effective medicament for the disease in his modern counterparts.

PETER MANIFESTED A SENSITIVE CONSCIENCE ABOUT HIS SIN EVEN THOUGH HE WAS FORGIVEN

The Holy Spirit is faithful to record the fact that Peter was “grieved” when Jesus asked him a third time about his love, and in doing so, provides a window through which to peer deep into his soul. *That one word colors the entire Tiberias event!* It would have been, substantively, a different story without that single word.

The word (*lupe*) is strong, and refers to emotional pain, deep sorrow, heart-felt grief. Though it is but a single word, it speaks volumes about Peter. The proof that he had, at this point in the relationship, been forgiven is that the subject was not expressly addressed. *It is simply impossible that the denials had not been dealt with and then not mentioned here.* Peter knew well, however, the reason for the third question; the stiletto had touched the nerve. He had denied the Lord three times and it cannot be accidental that Jesus questions Peter’s loyalty three times. The Lord certainly saw the pain in Peter’s face and heard it in his voice at His question. That precise moment, caught by a motion-picture camera, surely, would have captured, not only the pain in Peter’s countenance, but obvious emotions of various sorts in the faces of his comrades as well because of their affection for their friend. A modern reader with any capacity for identity with forgiven sinners being reminded of their sin would know something of that sick-hearted *lupe* as well.

Peter’s capacity for true pain, existential pain, over his sins, even though forgiven, gives witness to a critically important capacity on the part of all pastors--the ability to remember, with fresh pain of spirit, our own failures, regardless of how long they have been under Jesus’ word of grace. Pity the congregation who is saddled with a pastor down whose face hot tears of genuine sorrow at the memory of his own sin have never coursed, even if the sin has been forgiven for decades. After all, he must, until the end, deal constantly with his own failures and the failures of the members of his congregation. How, in the name of common logic, can a man have heart-felt sympathy for his sinning sheep carrying about a heart that cannot be *grieved*, not alone for their sin, but his own? A believing man walked out of my office years ago, having confessed horrid things to me. These words came out of my mouth as he walked out: “Lord, no man could possibly be called to be a pastor who does not know how to help sinners deal with their sin!” No profound thought, that, but a profoundly important thought! Thank you, Simon, son of Jonas, for that single-word predicate adjective your brother John penned about you; we should have been much the poorer without it!

It cannot be proven, but no one would be surprised to find, in heaven where we will know all things, that Peter went through several stages in regard to roosters: (a) Stage One: He hated them like the plague, (b) Stage Two: He developed a phobia of them and those who owned them, (c) Stage Three: He might have attempted to produce legislation which banned them from crowing within the city limits of Jerusalem, and (d) Stage Four: He came to treasure the early morning cock-crow because that sound forever spoke to him of the sweetness of Jesus’ forgiveness, and became a signal to him of redemption for as long as his ears could hear any sound. The place of our worst defeat may well become the place of our most significant victory, and the site of great joy for God’s forgiving and redeeming grace *if God’s Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to remember!* (Peter would, as an aside, surely be happy to know that there exists in Jerusalem a beautiful

church, “St. Peter at Gallicantu”—St. Peter at the Cock-crowing”, on the very site—the location of the home of Caiaphas the high priest where Christ was imprisoned that last Thursday night, and where his famous denials occurred. The dome of the church is dominated by the figure of a metallic rooster, reminding visitors from around the globe of the bitter/sweet experience of a rooster-crow early one morning so long ago!)

To put it starkly and simply: such actual experiences of forgiveness equip the pastor to assist other sinners in their moral crisis. (That, parenthetically, is the specific focus of the first two chapters of II Corinthians.) They produce a divine enablement which no amount of academic study can---as necessary as such study is. Will Rogers put it in the vernacular: “A man walking down the street with a wildcat under his arm knows thirty-seven times as much about wildcats as a man who has only read about wildcats.”

PETER'S RESPONSE ALLOWED GOD TO GRANT HIM EXTREME GIFTINGS

While reading a passage in one of Peter’s two epistles recently I thought, “How obviously true is our doctrine of the full inspiration of the Bible!” How so? The Bible and Christian history abound with demonstrable proof, but I saw it from a new perspective that day. If one were to read what Peter wrote (take the first eight verses of his first epistle, as a single instance) for the first time, even if he studied it merely from a purely literary point of view, he would be shocked that such profound wisdom could be encapsulated so compactly. The church has fed from it for two millennia now, and yet its depth and breadth continue to stun us, unless the film of familiarity has, indeed, bred contempt. And that wisdom was penned by a man “uneducated and untrained.” (Acts 4:13) Although the statement meant only that the disciples were not formally trained in the theological schools of the day, still, for a common fisherman’s compositions to have risen to the level they have bespeaks the unmistakable giftings of God, in large measure because the man had been so humbled God could trust him with such giftings. That is not to suggest Peter earned his right to be chosen of God to pen two books in our Bible; it is flatly to state that the man’s spirit was sufficiently in tune with the Holy Spirit that what he wrote was not foreign to his nature and to his walk. He was not out-preaching his actual experience, even though he himself would never have claimed to have understood all God had given him to write. In fact, he himself said the Old Testament saints did not fully understand what they wrote, and that the angels literally “stood on tiptoe” looking into the mystery of the faith. (See I Peter 1:10-11) He further, graciously and in humility, confessed that much of what his “beloved brother Paul” wrote was enigmatic to him. (II Peter 3:15; in passing, one would assume Paul, like all modern commentators, would have said the same about Peter’s passage in 3:18-22 of his first epistle which speaks of “preaching to the spirits in prison!”)

To ask the question is to answer it: what profound and far-reaching blessings has the church of the Lord Jesus missed because of the overweening hubris of shepherds who are flippant about---or unconscious of!--their own sins, past or present. They are the very last people on earth who should be so victimized! Stated positively, what monstrous hurt---a hurt that bears progeny for generations---has been perpetrated by the

soul-destroying effect of a proud and insensitive pastor! If the man of God ever becomes the answer to a congregation's prayer for a man of God as their shepherd, God and the shepherd will have done serious business about this issue.

This is an appropriate place, perhaps, to note a non-provable but almost-certain evidence that Peter took in, as a sovereign cure for pride, Jesus' double love He required at Tiberias: Peter's love Him as well as for His sheep. Peter's first epistle has as its essential message the encouragement to Christians going through various trials. His second one has to do, again, essentially, with the second coming of Christ and the end-time events. Although we know that the chapter and verse divisions of scripture are of rather recent origin, it is intriguing that in all five chapters of his first epistle there are explicit references---and encouragements---to love fellow Christians: (1) 1:22: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere (*anupokriton*= "unhypocritical") love of the brethren (*philadelphian*= brotherly love), love (*agapesate*=love) one another fervently (*ektenos*=literally, "stretched-out" or "on the stretch"!) with a pure spirit." (2) 2:17: "Love (*agapate*=love) the brotherhood." (3) 3:8: "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion (*sumpatheis*= suffer with) for one another; love as brothers (*philadelphoi*), be tenderhearted (*eusplagxnoi*=full of pity), be courteous, (*tapeinophrones*=humble-minded)." (4) 4:8: "And above all things have fervent (again, *ektene*) love (*agapen*) for one another, for 'love (*agape*) will cover a multitude of sins.'" (5) 5:14: "Greet one another with a kiss of love," (a combination of *phileo* and *agape*: *philemati*=a kiss and *agapes*=love). These sentences represent something of a lexicon of love: "fervent" speaks of a love which reaches out, extending itself to others by an act of the will, "compassion" is love that "weeps with those who weep," "tenderhearted" comes from the same word used of Jesus when He "was moved with compassion upon them," "courteous" means, as someone has said, "love in little things," and "kiss" expresses the warm-heartedness and affection of true love. Otherwise put, they represent the precise opposites of prideful arrogance. And finally put, they give evidence that Peter was a teachable student, "highly-coachable" to use a modern athletic term.

I heard a pastor speak at a pastor's conference over four decades ago, and remember two things that he said---which means it was a rare sermon. The message was heart-felt and sincere and down-to-earth. The man, Dr. Lee Robertson, one of the best-known pastors in America at that time and serving a very large church, was speaking about a pastor loving his flock. His first memorable sentence went something like this: "You must remember that everybody has a problem, and they do not want to hear yours; they want you to hear theirs. As long as you do that faithfully, you will have a growing and loving congregation." His second sentence went something like this: "After many years of pastoring God's people, I have heard every imaginable excuse for people leaving a church, but I never heard anybody say, 'Well, yes, I am leaving that church and I'm going to do it because they love me too much! I simply can't take it anymore!'"

Every pastor needs to ponder another fact about loving and serving his congregation, whether large or small. Some pastors worry about losing their flock to media ministers. All of us owe God thanksgiving for anybody who preaches the gospel, but no such man will ever be a threat to the pastor who ministers up close and personal. Love can occur from a distance, but it has a notoriously difficult time flourishing there.

Paradoxically, love hates distances! The reknown media minister will not visit sick sheep, perform weddings, dedicate newborns (perhaps generationally!), counsel troubled marriages, baptize or disciple new converts, visit prisoners, eat lunch with high school students, lead staff meetings, or show up for a work-day at the church. God bless him for the good he does for the kingdom, but he will never have privileges which the local pastor has every day of his life. He will never be the caring face of Christ to crushed humans. The media minister has the “advantage” of being able to evade sheep that are obstinate, sick, troubled, smelly, etc., but the “advantage,” turns out to be costly to both him and the sheep. The local pastor must face all that constantly, but in such a context he has the high privilege of making a redemptive difference in the lives of hurting and hurtful people---and in the process he is able to represent Christ’s own presence to them. *Not only so, but he is privileged, as well, to live out the most comprehensive statement of the Christian life in the entire New Testament: “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* (Galatians 6:2). The pastor learns a strategy for victory, having been mentored by his Tiberias Two. The process? It was put into memorable words by Edwin Markham in his Outwitted:

He drew a circle that shut me out---
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.

PETER ENDURED TO THE END

When modern American Christians speak of suffering and/or martyrdom for Christ and His cause, it is almost always a largely theoretical and academic exercise. Those who are acquainted with Christian history will be chary of speaking of suffering for the cause of Christ today. Modern Christians, especially in the west, have lived in a rare time when persecution of the faithful of any serious sort beyond preferment on the job, bullying of one sort or the other, or suffering through the late-night jesters’ lame attempts at religious humor, is rare. It is shocking to some to discover that it is otherwise in the third world, where missiologists generally agree that approximately a third of a million people die as Christian martyrs *every year*. Many Christian voices out of “Latrificasia” currently report widespread conditions in which Christians face the *likelihood* of suffering for Christ every day, and the *possibility* of giving up their lives for Him, which is some places can only be called commonplace. It is patently illegal to be a confessing Christian in many countries, or to invite others to become Christians, on pain of imprisonment, torture, and/or death. For Christians in those settings, martyrdom is not an academic study; it is an existential fact of daily life, and their preaching, music, and personal worship reflect that. Even the secular news media in the west, not noted for their concern for specifically Christian “human rights,” occasionally report current incidents of Christian persecution and martyrdom. It was, again, as all students of history know, much different in the first century when our Tiberias event occurred. To be a Christian meant to be looked down upon as an obscurantistic oddball or worse, a positive threat to society. It meant to be harangued, to risk losing one’s livelihood, and to live in a context in which severe persecution of Christians was perfectly acceptable, indeed, at times popular.

In Peter's case, we know that he experienced all the general animosity toward the early church, we know that he was imprisoned (Acts 4:3), that he was, with others, on several occasions brought before the Sanhedrin and quizzed and threatened about his activities (Acts 4:15), that he was imprisoned again (5:18) by the Sadducees who "were filled with indignation" against him and his cause. Later, he was again brought with others before the Sanhedrin (5:28) and beaten (vs 40); when he and others were released, they went "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." (vs 41) We know that following the murder of fellow-believer Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12:1-2), Herod seized Peter, arrested him and put him in prison once more, almost certainly intending to kill him as he had James (vss 3-4). (One is careful here not to think of the biblical word "prison" in modern terms, where food and clothing and shelter are provided in a setting in which the very law the prisoner has violated protects him!) We know, as well, that, because of his proper response to the vision of the inclusion of the gentiles in God's plan for salvation, as is recorded in Acts 10, he experienced a serious reaction by fellow-believers, the so-called "circumcision" faction in Jerusalem (Acts 11). Following the Jerusalem council, meeting in 50 A.D., Peter drops largely out of sight except for scattered references, so we cannot speak explicitly about other troubles he might have experienced as a leader of the dangerous sect known as the "Way." We do not have a complete report of his suffering, or that of any other follower of Christ, in the New Testament.

A strong tradition, dating back to Eusebius in the early third century, indicates that Peter was imprisoned in Rome and was murdered during the reign of Nero, perhaps in 68-70 A.D. at the age of about 75. From a later tradition, we are told that he was crucified upside down, in deference to Jesus' own crucifixion.

A celebrated Italian artist, Annibale Carracci painted, in the early seventeenth century, a picture of Jesus and Peter based on a passage from the apocryphal "Acts of Peter." Jesus is depicted as carrying His cross along a road and being met by Peter, who is fleeing from Rome because he fears being crucified. He asks Jesus, "Domine, Quo vadis?" i.e., "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus responds that He is returning to Rome to be crucified again. Peter's conscience is pricked and causes him to realize it is he, and not Jesus, who must return to Rome to be crucified.

Much of that may well be mythological, but that he was crucified under Nero almost certainly is not. Though there is little else that we know, specifically, about his suffering and death, we do know that he faithfully ministered until the end of his life and died an older man, *precisely as Jesus had told him at least thirty-five years earlier at Tiberias*. We do not know if the subject was ever discussed between the two again, but we do have the tantalizing sentence in II Peter 1:14, "...knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me." He is referring either to the Tiberias event or a more recent revelation reiterating Jesus' prediction of his death.

No one who reads the New Testament can be surprised that the invitation to become a follower of Christ carries with it, not the possibility, but the probability of suffering for His name, even to the point of death. And that is especially true of pastors who are, inevitably, the first to suffer when their flock is attacked. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated it in memorable terms in the demonic madness of Nazi Germany. With his

own eyes, Bonhoeffer witnessed the Nazi regime sending pastors from the “confessing church,” (i.e., true Bible-believing shepherds) to the front lines before other German men, guaranteeing their early death. Some historians say German evangelicalism has never recovered from the loss of almost all their “confessing church” pastors in that manner. Following Christ is not a parlor game, and must not sink to the level of a “cheap grace,” as Bonhoeffer said---a “grace” that demonstrates no personal discipline, a grace that evades danger, a grace that dares not offend the secular order, whether in the church or out of it. Christianity is an explicit summons to be faithful to Christ and His cause until death. Jesus was asking Peter at Tiberias, without using the specific words, to follow Him all the way to the end of his life in faithful service, and---knowing that Peter was willing to do so---predicted Peter’s execution late in life. Peter could not possibly have thought otherwise, and we must at least imagine its possibility and prepare for it.

The point is: that message is not unique to Tiberias! The New Testament is replete with it: (a) In Acts 14, Paul warns very recent converts: “We must, through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (vs 22) (b) Paul warns a young pastor: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come,” and concludes his chapter on suffering of followers of Christ by saying, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (II Timothy 3:1, 12) (c) Again, Paul writes that, in regard to the unrighteous persecuting the righteous, we may expect no substantive change with the passage of time: “But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.” (Galatians 4:29) (d) John says in I John 3:13, “Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you,” which reminds us of John’s other quote from Jesus’ lips: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” (John 15: 18) (e) All that harks back to what Jesus said in Matthew 10: 16: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,” and later in the same chapter He gives a lengthy discussion as to the predictability of suffering: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword,” (v34) and then launches into a discussion of troubles in one’s own home---a reality millions of modern Christians currently experience. He concludes by saying that “...he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. And he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (vss 38-39) (d) John 15:20 has Jesus saying, “Remember the word that I said to you. ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” (e) Finally, there is that poignant and memorable sentence which Jesus spoke to “the daughters of Jerusalem” on His way to the cross: “For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?,” meaning, “If these things be done in the good times, what shall be done in the evil times?”

The foregoing passages represent only a smattering of clear warnings in the New Testament relative to suffering for the cause of Christ, and the modern pastor, while refusing to retreat into guerrilla warfare or to become victim to a martyr complex, will be sobered by such warnings. They may well explain some of his current experiences! In any case, he will steel himself against thinking that worse things cannot happen to him. All of that, as well, will give strength to his prayers for his persecuted brothers and sisters around the globe, and at home as well.

It is possible that if Jesus spoke to all pastors today, it is possible, I say, that He might include a passage

which goes something like this:"As to your difficulties and challenges, you cannot possibly be surprised, being aware as you are, both of the Bible and thousands of years of extra-biblical history, that you have discovered that modern Christian leaders have it tough at times. You would have to have known, from a first reading of My own words that I gave it to you straight, not only to you but to all my followers. You will discover that it is more than worth it all, but the Father has so ordained that, in the divine economy, suffering is a necessary aspect of the walk of faith. Finally, do not be deceived by the comfort which characterizes western Christendom today; it will not always be that way. "

A pastor once told me that the most shocking truth he had ever learned about his pastoral ministry related to an assumption of his on entering the work. He thought that if he loved and served his people, if he lived a godly life before them, was a faithful husband, properly reared his family, energetically pursued the work of the ministry, was devoted to prayer and personal evangelism, *that everybody in town would love him*. His confession to me was that he, upon reflection, realized it was a stupid assumption and he moved to a sounder base of ministry---that of attempting to please the Lord!

Neither our first nor our second mentor died a natural death; they were both executed as criminals for their loyalty to the Kingdom of God. Millions have followed them, and no Christian should be surprised if he is called upon today---or when the predicted "perilous" times toward the end of history descend upon us--- to do the same. To state such things is shocking to modern ears, but we cannnot say that we were not explicitly warned!

How does a modern pastor prepare for such possibilities?

(a)First, he admits, explicitly, to himself and his loved ones and fellow Christians that such possibilities exist, indeed, that such *probabilities* exist. And he confesses, if only quietly to himself and to the Lord, "I don't have to survive!"

(b) He recognizes as well, that it is better to fail in a great cause than to succeed in a little one, even if that means giving up our lives for such a cause if need be. It is also important to know, however, that no Christian can ever, in any final sense, fail. We have read the final chapter of the book and we know how things are going to turn out. G. K. Chesterton has a perceptive line, typical of his famed paradoxes: the pagan is happy about the little things and sad about the big things; we, on the other hand, he said, are sad about the little things, but happy about the big ones.

(c)He remembers that God does not give grace for suffering until suffering comes, and that He does not give dying grace until the executioner appears. Do not expect dying grace before it is required, and do not expect that you will have to conjure it up in your own strength. Jesus will be there.

(d) He will determine that his bitter experiences will not produce bitterness of spirit, that baneful blight which has infected vast forests of spiritual timber. I use another personal illustration here: I have been careful never to say that I have suffered for Jesus and/or His cause. Some stretches of the road, and some of the

obstacles on it, were not pleasant, but I refuse to speak of sacrifice lest the Lord Jesus allow me to experience the real thing. In fact, bitter experiences have, properly processed, the mysterious power to produce sweetness of spirit. The memory of a certain specific bitter event, extremely painful at the moment, brought me into a place of lasting blessing. *The key is: by an act of your will, refuse to drink the poison offered by the enemy!*

The “specific bitter event?” There have been several, of course, but I speak of one which was especially instructive. A woman, a faithful member of our congregation, and a friend of the family, became enamored with a passing religious fad and she felt obliged to instruct me, thoroughly, in the nuances of her new-found deeper spiritual understanding. She, of course, had a perfect right to do so and I had a perfect responsibility to kindly hear her out. She proceeded to berate me for my spiritual ignorance and vigorously did so for half an hour or so. I took it all in choosing not to criticize her or her off-centered theology which, she said, required that we simply deny sickness if it “seemed” to occur to us. She left not long before lunch, and, while driving home for mine, I heard myself informing the Lord, out loud, that “98% of what she said was garbage.” He responded, “That is true...but what about the 2%?” Quiet. And then this: *“Would you rather be an undisciplined boy or a chastened man?”* Where I grew up, the country folk have a saying: “If a donkey brays at you and only two percent of what he says is right, take the two percent.” Thus, with such wise rustic forebears, I was well aware of what I had to say to the Lord. I have never told her what a true blessing her hatchet-job produced in me. One other note: I suspect that modern forensics could identify the driver of my VW beetle by the indentations left by my fingers on the steering wheel forty years ago.

(e)He practices dying a little bit every day. Paul told his Corinthian friends “I die daily.” (I Corinthians 15:31) That does not mean he was morbidly pre-occupied every day with his own funeral; it does mean that he was never unaware that death might be much nearer than was apparent, and that the exigencies of the ministry could well cost him his life. A missionary, upon arriving on a dangerous field, was asked by the director of the work. “Are you willing to die here, if needs be?” The missionary answered, “I did that before I left America.” The shock to our ears, upon hearing of such a thing, or of even imagining such a thing, speaks to the shallowness of much modern Christianity. By “dying daily,” he means, perhaps principally, that he had to die to his own personal wishes and plans and goals in the pursuit of God’s wishes and plans and goals. Thus, he is called upon to die before he has to die!

Bonhoeffer put it this way:

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death---we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time---death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. (17)

Practice telling your flesh that it may not always have its way. Practice the possibility of losing a cherished relationship, or philosophy, or pleasure, or habit. Practice “suffering for righteousness sake”---an odd thought in a modern world. Do not strive to be spectacular, but faithful. Set it as your goal: “I may be, at times, tired in the work, but by God’s energizing grace, I shall never be tired *of* the work.”

(f) He refuses to forget that *if*(that is the operative word!) he is unjustly treated for Jesus’ sake, he has---in that experience---an opportunity to please Christ and gain His greater blessing in the Bema Judgment, the judgment of believer’s works, as is promised in I Corinthians 3:11-15.

(g) He is determined to “Occupy” until Jesus returns! That word (*pragmateusasthe*), from which we get our word “pragmatic,” speaks of being “busily engaged in business,” in our case, the biggest business in human history. This is no time to lose heart, to take in the sails, to slack off the ropes, to give in to the nihilistic spirit of the age, or to “wait for a better season.” “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.” (Ecclesiastes 11:4) It is a time to act and to act proactively. Let every agent of the Kingdom (and every agency of the Kingdom as well) be at his or her or its best. The verb here is, by the way, in the imperative mood, the mood of command. *Further, he stays at the task, with energy, when he finds, alas, that most days are marked more by “maintenance” than “miracle.”*

(h) He reads about martyrs, both ancient and modern. (*Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, subtitled “A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christians and the Protestant Martyrs,” first published in 1563, is an absolute necessity, after the New Testament!) William Estep’s *The Anabaptist Story* is a riveting and graphic account of the persecution of the “radical Reformation.” Paul Marshall’s *Their Blood Cries Out*, Nina Shea’s *In The Lion’s Den*, and Marti Hefley’s *Christian Martyrs of the Twentieth Century* are good reads. A recent book by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* is exceptional, another must read. An organization called “The Voice of the Martyrs” (VOM) produces a periodical and other literature which produces updated information on the subject. *The winners do not read losers; they read winners. All truth is our truth, but some truth is more compelling than other truth, and the truth of suffering brothers and sisters in the faith energizes us as do few other truths.* Ponder, in that regard, a passage out of Jenkins’ book in reference to suffering current Christians are enduring in places like Nigeria, Egypt, the Sudan, and Indonesia, to mention but a few locations of intense animus against our faith and its practitioners:

In all these varied situations, ordinary believers are forced to understand why they are facing these sufferings, and repeatedly they do so in the familiar language of the Bible and of the earliest Christianity. To quote one Christian in Maluku, recent massacres and expulsions from that region are ‘according to God’s plan. Christians are under purification from the Lord.’ The church in Sudan, the victim of perhaps the most savage religious repression anywhere in the world, has integrated its sufferings into its liturgy and daily practice, and has produced some moving literature in the process (‘Death has come to reveal the faith/It has begun with us and it will end with us.’)...In Guatemala or Rwanda, as in the Sudan, martyrdom is not merely a subject for historical research, it is a real prospect. *As we move into the new century, the situation is likely to get worse rather than better.*(18, emphasis added)

In the year 1900 a Christian periodical was renamed “The Christian Century” because its admittedly theologically left-leaning editors thought the church was ready to experience rapid growth and become more culturally relevant than ever before in her history. The editors would never have used the phrase “The Church Triumphant,” but that is precisely what they believed their historical era was destined to be. The century, however, chose not to co-operate with the editors, and proved to be an especially troublesome time for Christendom. It saw the rise of Nazism, Fascism, Communism and other barbaric statisms which threatened to overwhelm the church, and in many areas did just that. *A largely unknown fact about martyrdom is that more people died for their faith in Christ in the 20th century than in all preceding centuries combined.* “Not even the gladiators and wild beasts of Decius and Diocletian have matched in ferocity the tidal waves of hatred unleashed (against Christians) in our century.” (19)

g. He wins people to Christ and disciplines them in the faith. Let every pastor, rowing upstream against an inept staff (or no staff!), a lethargic lay leadership, a congregation which is clueless about the rigors of New Testament Christianity, even a denomination which, despite the blather, simply has no heart for the conversion of the lost and the training of the newly-converted, let that pastor, I say, understand this: no power in the universe can prevent you from being a fruitful evangelist and discipler of others. The truth before God is that the only barrier to that noblest of all work is...yourself. No other human, or group of humans, can prevent a disciplined and committed man from being a success in that area. Shakespeare has called us out by name: “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in us, that we are underlings!” We are to ponder seriously, to take to heart, and to act upon that other powerful metaphor Jesus employed about our calling, that of being “*fishers of men*,” and not simply keepers of the aquarium. Many a pastor, thwarted at every turn by irresolvable local church or family, or many other sorts of barriers to effective ministry, has found abundant and everlasting joy in helping birth lambs and tending them to spiritual adulthood.

“Spiritual adulthood?” We have, on several occasions, observed that a call to disciple spiritual newborns is inherent in the call to be a shepherd. It is not something added to the call, but one of the two pillars upon which our summons to ministry stands: conversion and catechising. That fact is clearly stated by our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20 in what is popularly called “The Great Commission” to His church. He commands us there to *make* disciples, to *mark* disciples, and to mature disciples. The Holy Spirit does not mince words and the meaning of the language is inescapable: *matheteusate* means to make a disciple, *baptizontes* speaks of baptizing a disciple, and *didaskontes* speaks of teaching a disciple. (We get all our “didactic” words from that third word.) God will be pleased (and the pastor will as well!) to raise up ministry assistants to help us in all areas of ministry, including the three in Jesus’ command just referenced, but nothing he can do or say excuses any pastor for not giving a high priority in his own life and ministry to them. *He is, after all, the leader, and he need never expect from his people what he does not practice himself.* The pastoral rule is: we will, infallibly, be imitated, and it is not by accident that serious spiritual disciplines are disastrously weak among modern church members precisely because they are weak in the lives of their pastors. John Wesley said to win a person to Christ and not disciple him into maturity is “to produce a child for the murderer.” Perhaps the most egregious scandal in the modern church is its refusal to engage in discipling new converts, which refusal is often led by the pastor himself. If a pastor says that he assumes that spiritual newborns are being

discipled in his flock, let him ask himself: *when and where and how and by whom, and for how long, and to what depth, specifically, is that occurring in my church, today.* To cite a single specific subject (but a pivotally important one): how long will it be before the next convert in your church or mine is instructed in the biblical principles of supporting God's work financially? To ask the question is to answer it. And to excuse our silence by saying, "Well, we don't want them thinking all we want is their money" betrays a horrific misunderstanding of the reality that giving has nothing, essentially, to do with the church budget—*it has everything to do with being a disciple of Jesus.* What right does any Christian, especially one who is assigned a teaching role, have to refuse to communicate clearly what God has explicitly commanded us to teach and to practice? And what right does such a person have to deprive new Christians of the inevitable joy which attends obedience to Christ---*a joy which the pastor himself exults in as he obeys Christ?* Every member of Christ's church has an inherent right to be shepherded by man who is consistently practicing the basic disciplines of the Christian faith! All that is to cite but one of many neglected subjects in the catechising of new converts, all of which are designed to cause us to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ." (Ephesians 4:15).

The sheer illogic, itself, of not aiding and abetting, purposefully and intentionally, the growth of the spiritual neophyte borders on the incredible. The proof of that is clearly demonstrated by inquiring of industry its requirements of new employees and to hear industry captains state their logic in requiring such a rigorous training regimen: "We simply cannot afford the loss of money." If financial gain is such a driving force to "disciple" new employees in the world of the sons of darkness, what should ours be, who are only preparing the spiritually young for an entire life of effective ministry, and heaven itself? We may find that the communication of one single Christian skill---that of sharing our faith with others, let us say---weighs more in heaven than the profits produced by America's ten largest corporations---in a decade!

IN HIS RESPONSE, PETER RESCUED HIS FUTURE

God says, "Behold, we count them happy who endure." (James 5:11; the word is *makarios*, not "happy," but "blessed," "worthy of imitation," "spiritually rich," etc.) Not the ones who give up, who quit the race, who throw in the towel. (For non-boxing fans, when a fighter's manager sees that his charge cannot go on with the fight, he tosses a white towel into the middle of the ring, signifying to all that he accepts defeat for his own fighter who cannot continue the bout.)

We have observed that some men leave the pastorate for legitimate reasons, and no one should presume to know all that is in such a man's heart---or in his health or family or financial circumstances; all that is between a man and his Lord. A profound difference exists between *quitting* and *stopping.* God never tells a man to quit, but He always---in the very nature of the case---allows each of His servants to stop at some point. On earth, at least!

It is almost always too soon to cease ministering. The way, often, is not out but through. There is too much investment in the past, too much opportunity in the present, and too much blessing in the future to cease easily or quickly, without careful thought and prayer and counsel from godly people. The rule, as always, is “let every man be fully persuaded in his own heart.”

Let every overworked and underpaid and under-appreciated pastor seriously contemplate the results in the life of our second mentor had he never returned to Christ after his disastrous rooster experience. *The question is, “What if Peter had not shown up at Tiberias?* The end of his story might have sounded something like: “At about the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, Simon simply slipped out of sight, and nobody ever heard of him again.” Or “Simon Peter? Yes, some say he lived the life of a ne’er-do-well, begging for food and broken by drink; he left his family, wandered the streets and was found dead one morning. They put him in a pauper’s grave.” Or, “Simon became a hopeless emotional and mental cripple and a pariah who died alone, nobody knows quite when or where. Nobody ever heard.” That, thankfully, is nothing like the real story! In fact, Peter’s future was exciting and fulfilling beyond anything he could possibly have imagined at Tiberias. *The following is not his complete biography, but it does give pause to the man contemplating throwing in the towel! Had Peter not returned to Tiberias and to His Lord and to his call...*

- (1) He would have missed seeing the empty tomb---not bad for starters!
- (2) He would have missed seeing and talking with the risen Christ on resurrection Sunday, and at other post-resurrection occasions.
- (3) He would have missed fellowship with the Lord and his fellow-disciples at the seashore. (John 21)
- (4) He would have missed his future life-time assignment. (John 21)
- (5) He would have missed meeting with the five-hundred believers mentioned in I Corinthians 15:5.
- (6) He would have missed being an eyewitness of the ascension of Christ! (Acts 1:4-11)
- (7) He would have missed the experience of leading the church to replace Judas (Acts 1:13, 15)
- (8) He would have missed preaching at Pentecost and being the instrument of God in thousands coming into the Kingdom. (Acts 2: 14-40)
- (9) He would have missed his part in the healing of the lame man and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 2-5)
- (10) He would have missed preaching in Samaria and seeing there, the Holy Spirit fall on *gentile* believers. (Acts 8) (“He opened the doors of the church to the gentiles” is a common phrase describing Peter’s ministry.)
- (11) He would have missed his key leadership role in the fledgling church. (Acts 1-12)
- (12) He would have missed being used of God to heal Aeneas and raising Dorcas from the dead. (Acts 9)
- (13) He would have missed the vision at Joppa and the conversion of Cornelius. (Acts 10)
- (14) The church, for all its history, would have been cheated of his marvelous counsel in his two epistles, including giving us much new information on the second coming of Christ which no other apostle told us about.
- (15) He would have missed out on a lifetime of ministry. (John 21)
- (16) He would have missed giving his name to countless numbers of men in most of the countries of the world.
- (17) He would have missed giving his name to countless numbers of cities, counties, states, and provinces all over the earth.

(18) He would have missed giving his name to countless numbers of churches around the world. And streets. And schools of every sort and size. And creeks and rivers and almost any other object or being which bears a name.

(19) He would have missed becoming a faithful martyr, to the glory of God, under Nero, and one of the best-known and respected men in western civilization.

John Greenleaf Whitter laments:

For all sad words of tongue and pen,
The saddest are these, “It might have been.”

But no such lamentation for Peter! “Might have been” is transmuted into “Was!”

Who cannot be sobered by the incalculable and irreversible sadness Peter would have experienced had he refused to face his failure with maturity and grace and perseverance. And sobered as well to contemplate the sadness---a sadness representing losses in time and eternity, in their own lives and countless others--- *of pastors* who had neither his maturity nor grace to persevere. And sobered as well to contemplate our own fathomless sadness if we do not emulate our second mentor. I speak of losses, not only to us, which alone would produce oceanic grief; I speak of losses for the King and His Kingdom! How gracious He is to allow us, broken, *but redeemable*, pieces of humanity, to have any part in what He is doing in human history.

The high privilege of the call to serve the Lord Jesus as a pastor of His sheep was never better put than the following, a portion of a sermon preached by Dr. B. H. Carroll, then pastor of the First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas. He was preaching on Paul’s exultant words, “I magnify my office” (Romans 11:13), and concluded with these words:

I magnify my office, O my God, as I get nearer home, I can say more truthfully every year, “I thank God He put me in this office;” I thank Him that He would not let me have any other; that He shut me up to this glorious work; and when I get home among the blessed on the bank of the everlasting deliverance and look back toward time and all of its clouds and sorrows, and pains, and privation, I expect to stand up and shout for joy that down there in the fog and mists, down there in the dust and struggle, God let me be a preacher. I magnify my office in life; I magnify it in death; I magnify it in heaven; I magnify it, whether poor, or rich, whether sick or well, whether strong or weak, anywhere, everywhere, among all people, in any crowd. Lord God, I am glad that I am a preacher, that I am a preacher of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Baylor student, S. P. Brooks, later to become the president of Baylor, sat in the congregation and later wrote the following about the impact of Dr. Carroll’s message on his own life:

The preacher’s office was held aloft, not the big preacher’s alone,

but the little preacher as well. The dignity of the work he showed not to be limited to the city pastors alone, but extended to the humble country workers as well. He exalted the work of the ministry to such a point that it presented the one single time in my life that I wished I were in its service. Up to the time I heard Dr. Carroll preach on this great theme I had in spirit resented all my life the hardships incident to the life of my own father who, as a country preacher, had labored on the farm and in the schoolroom for a living while he literally gave his life for others in unremunerative toil. I grew up in rebelling that my mother, a cultured, educated woman, should endure the toils incident to the home of the country pastor and missionary. I honestly felt that somehow they did not get a square deal. Then came Dr. Carroll's sermon. He exalted the preacher and crushed my arrogant pride. He spoke a language that my father and mother had long known well, and he spoke it in such terms that I began to see a meaning in pastoral ministrations to which I had been a stranger theretofore. I left the house with a broken spirit. My heart was crushed. I went to bed that night with sleepless eyes. I cried the live long night. I could not get away from the picture Dr. Carroll had drawn. Morning came. With it, a joy that had not been mine before. I was glad that my father was a preacher, and a little one at that, as the world counts greatness. I felt a new kinship and spoke a new language. I had been born again as to appreciation of what constitutes a really noble purpose in life. (20)

CONCLUSION

We now return to Tiberias for a closing comment. No study of the experience there could be complete without putting a certain phrase, often overlooked amid the emotional and theological thunder of the passage, under our microscope. It is Jesus' temporal clause in v 22 (repeated by John in v23), *eos erchomai*, "... until I come!"

It cannot be a little thing that the Lord Jesus spoke explicitly of the grand finale of human history, His literal return to the earth. Imponderably profound implications will attend the event. The end will come, not as the scientists assure us, in the death of our solar system, but in the return of Christ to the earth for His own. Numberless tomes have been written on the subject, but our interest here is the *significance of the event for the pastor*; the shepherd of God's people.

His chief business is to be a prophet of the event, to teach and preach it, to ever keep his eye on it, his heart attached to it, his mind full of it and to minister in the light of it. No truth will so embolden and energize the pastor, or so enrich his preaching, as to know that his Chief Shepherd Whom he serves, and to Whom he shall give account, is going to appear one day to present the faithful shepherd with an "unfading crown of glory." To be anchored in the past by Jesus' call to ministry and to the future by the anticipation of His return is to experience cosmic joy amid what is often the maddening demands of pastoral ministry.

Paul was full of such anticipation regarding the "blessed hope," and spoke of receiving from Jesus, not a pastoral crown, but a "crown of righteousness," which, he said, would be given to him, "and to all who love His appearing." (II Timothy 4:8) What difference does it make, in the trauma and tragedy and trials which so often mark the work of the pastorate, that a man "loves His appearing?" (1) It speaks of our love for Him

or else we would not be moved by the event; it is not what is going to happen, it is Who is going to happen. (2) The pastor who loves His appearing will have an unspeakable peace which no other fact can produce. (3) Such an anticipation will have the effect of producing a purposeful focus of our attention and efforts in the work---that of preparing men for His coming. (4) Such an anticipation will dramatically deepen our patience with the folly and foibles and failures of ourselves and our sheep, knowing that history is His story and is heading toward His victory and ours. It means that our epitaph will not read like the memorable one Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Macbeth upon hearing of his queen's death:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard of no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(Macbeth, Act V, Scene 5, lines 11-19)

Peter could not possibly have forgotten that Jesus said those words --- “till I come”--- on Tiberias, nor is it possible to believe that his ministry was not charged with power and enthusiasm and perseverance upon every recollection of them. *His second epistle has as its major theme the return of the Lord*, and within a couple of years of his death, he writes a passage regarding the pastoral ministry *with a peroration focusing on that selfsame subject*:

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. (I Peter 5:1-5)

The passage is a mother-lode of spiritual gold for all pastors, enough for a lifetime of excavation. The vein is so vast that, after two thousands of years of mining there, it is nothing like exhausted. (1) Peter remembers that which he could never forget, i.e., his own witnessing of the sufferings of our Lord. (2) He was, he said, “a partaker of the glory that will be revealed,” harking back to his participation in the transfiguration of Christ and looking forward to experiencing that divine effulgence again. Forever! (3) He then commands the pastors of northern Asia Minor (see I Peter 1:1), as well as pastors of all time, to “shepherd” or tend to the needs of believers; that is our word *poimanate* again. (4) The “flock” is *poimnion*, a cognate of the word

for shepherd. (5) “Of God,” i.e., which belongs to God. (6) “Taking the oversight” translates *episcopos*, from *epi* and *skopein*, literally, “to look over, but also to guide, lead,” etc., and is a reference to the broader pastoral work of the general care for and guidance of the flock. (7) That is to be done, not by compulsion (*anagkastos*=by force) but willingly. No pastor should ever be forced upon a congregation, nor should he use force in ministering to his flock. In the west we have “*cattle-drovers*;” in the east the shepherd *leads* the sheep. *Authority is granted, not grasped, and once granted must never be abused or taken for granted as it can be “un-granted” even more quickly than granted!* As is true of the development of all spiritual relationships, human and divine, they can only be developed slowly, but can be destroyed suddenly. (h) We are to serve “eagerly.” *Prothumos* has at its root *thumos* which refers to “passion,” “energy,” “vitality,” literally “warmth.” (8) It is impossible for money-matters not to enter the discussion of pastoral work, or for money not to be abused in the ministry, so Peter, as early as 67 A.D. or so, gives us the antidote for all pastoral financial malfeasance: “Do not do your work eager for base (or “low” or “evil”) gain (*aischrokerdos*), a word that is used only here in the New Testament. He surely was recalling Jesus’ “hireling” sermon of John 10. (9) He reminds us that we are not superiors but servants: “Nor as being lords (or “exercising lordship”) over those entrusted to you.” (10) We are to be examples (*tupos*=“types”, “patterns”) to the flock. (11) We may expect the return of the Lord, the Chief Shepherd (*archipoimenos*=“first”, “foremost”, or “chief” shepherd, again, used only here in the New Testament) and for Him to return in splendor. “Appear” is John’s word in reporting Jesus’ “manifestation” at Tiberias, *phanerothentos*=“shining forth”, “radiantly appearing”). (12) And when He does appear, pastors will receive a crown, i.e., the shepherd’s crown for faithful care for God’s flock.

It is significant that Peter’s “crown” here is the word *stephanos*, and not the other New Testament word translated “crown,” *diademos*. The latter is a crown which kings or other potentates wore by virtue of their position. Peter’s word, *stephanos*, however, is strikingly different; it is invariably given in recognition of *valor* either in a military or sporting or civic setting. The pastoral ministry knows nothing of a “crown” representing royalty in the usual sense; it does know, and knows well, of a crown earned in the arena, on the field of combat, in selfless service to God’s people. There is another striking difference between Peter’s crown and all others: it is *amarantinos*, another word used only here in the New Testament, which derives from the mythical Amarynth, a flower which was said never to wilt or die. Paul has exactly the same perspective in his “... everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a *perishable crown*, but we for an *imperishable crown*.” (I Corinthians 9:25, emphasis added) Heaven’s perception is a stunning one, and beyond conception or belief by most humans: *the day will come when no crown, of any sort, which has ever been awarded on earth will exist!*

A final distinction about the pastoral *stephanos*: it is a crown “of glory,” that is, it will reflect God’s eternal glory when all previous “glory” has been reduced to ashes.

The point of all mentoring is, in the very nature of the case, *to learn, to learn in such a way that our learning manifests itself in our actions*. It is “iron sharpening iron.” Alas, unresponsive students go with all pastoral territory! Attempt to imagine a pastor coming to the end of his days confessing that every student of his learned and applied all the material he, the pastor, had taught! Or that the pastor himself had done so! Or

this: you see, in a churchyard, a statue of a man, and this inscription at his feet: (1) He died without personal debt, (2) He died without personal scandal, (3) He was never fired by a congregation, (4) He and his wife produced godly offspring, and (5) Every member of his congregation believed and practiced all he ever taught." And above the inscription? "The Tomb of the Unknown Pastor!"

This book was not specifically designed to encourage laymen to "get" the truths revealed at the Tiberias Tryst, *though they are meant for every Christian*. Our focus, however, has been on the pastor. The book is an explicit plea for every such man to imbibe those truths, and to practice them---i.e., to be saturated with them in our bone-marrow. Among other things, how can we honestly expect to transmit what we do not possess, knowing that Christianity is not so much taught as caught. Some physical materials are non-conductors of electricity, and, no matter how elegant and gifted as speakers, pastors are destined to live and die as non-conductors of spiritual electricity apart from an experience with Christ that has all the marks of having graduated from His seminar at Tiberias. Otherwise, the end of his story will sound something like "The Lesson" of an anonymous author:

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering them around him, he taught them, saying:

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are they that mourn.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are they that thirst for justice.

Blessed are you when persecuted.

Blessed are you when you suffer.

Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven.

Then Simon Peter said, 'Are we supposed to know this?'

And Andrew said, 'Do we have to write this down?'

And James said, 'Will we have a test on this?'

And Phillip said, 'I don't have any paper.'

And Bartholomew said, "Do we have to turn this in?"

And John said, ‘The other disciples didn’t have to learn this.’

And Mathew said, ‘May I go the boys’ room?’

And Judas said, “What does this have to do with real life?”

Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus’ lesson plan and inquired of Him, ‘Where are your objectives in the cognitive domain?’

And Jesus wept.”

I have reserved to this point the report of an experience which epitomizes what Tiberias is all about. It captures the transcendent truth about Tiberias which, simply put, is about being alone and in intimate converse with Christ. Technically, that did not occur at Tiberias. It had occurred in that previous conversation between Jesus and Peter on resurrection Sunday when they were truly alone with each other. Apparently Peter, although traumatized with crippling guilt, did not let that fact prevent his meeting with the Saviour in private. And now, *though others are present*, in a sense the two of them are alone again. We all recall times when we were so immersed in conversation with someone that we were oblivious to the presence of others. The Tiberias conversation is so pointed, so acute, so intensely personal, that one would not be surprised if such a thing happened to Peter. Whatever the case, Peter manifested a willingness to have this second conversion, because he knew that Jesus had specifically said He would meet the disciples in Galilee and He finds Peter waiting for Him when He arrives. Had he not wanted to speak to Jesus personally, or to interact personally with Him, one can be absolutely certain that neither conversation would have taken place.

I am of the settled opinion that one fact and one fact alone is the surest indicator of the nature, the true nature, of the relationship one has to Jesus---and that is how much he either resists or relishes being alone with Him. That is true of one’s life in general, and it is true for each day of the journey. One is hard-pressed to think that David, although a man of whom it is twice said (I Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) that he was a man “after God’s own heart,” wanted to be alone with God on the night of his tryst with Bathsheba. Or that the events of the night would have occurred if he had been in close communion with Him! It is the same, one safely surmises, about the night after he had sent Uriah to the battle-front with the general’s death-sentence in his own hand. A difficult time, one would think, to pen a song of personal praise to Jehovah, and to boast---as David often did in his psalms---of his uprightness before his God!

The experience? A vibrant Christian woman suffered from low self-esteem, largely due to the relationship she had had, or, more accurately, had not had, with her father. She was certain he loved her, but he rarely---in fact, she never remembered him doing so---openly showed affection for her. Her lack of emotional fulfillment was a low-grade emotional fever---never immobilizing her but always nagging at her heart. She said she had no sense of being angry with God about the matter, but could not shake the persistent malaise.

She spoke to me of her unease and asked for counsel. At some point in the conversation, I envisioned a scenario---one which had never occurred to me before that moment---to which I asked her to respond. I asked her to assume her husband and son had left for the day, and she was in her robe, sitting at her breakfast table in the garden room, having morning toast and coffee and reading the morning newspaper. I said, "You hear a knock at the den door (which opens to her back yard), and believing it to be your neighbor woman friend, you say, without looking up, 'Come on in.' Let us suppose, however, that it is not your neighbor friend, but the Lord Jesus. What would you do?" "Well, she said," I suppose I'd stand up." "And then what?" I asked. "I guess I'd start walking toward Him." "And what," I asked, "would He be doing?" Her eyes became moist, and she said, "He would be smiling at me." "And then what?" I asked. "He would start walking toward me, I think." "And then what?" I asked. She teared up a bit, quieted herself, and then said, "*He would give me a hug.*" "And what would He say to you?" I asked. She began to weep, then cried openly, and then this: "He would tell me He loved me, and then He'd tell me to have a great day."

That sentence spoke volumes about her: she had no fear of her Lord and she knew she was truly significant to Him. I knew something else: she might well have begun her trip on the road to healing. I said to her, "S---, why don't you let Him do that every morning for the rest of your life?"

That conversation occurred on her second appointment with me. A couple of weeks later our paths crossed at church and she, in passing, smiled and said, "Pastor, I don't think we have to talk about all that again." We never did. And three decades later, she continues to walk in joyous victory.

The only time in my entire pastoral ministry I ever asked any other person that question occurred some years later. A woman in our town came to me for counsel. She was proud of the fact that she was an avowed atheist and enjoyed shocking Christians with what she perceived to be her daring world-view. I shared with her some basic aspects of the Christian position regarding atheism, but I had learned by then that a great deal of time is typically wasted arguing philosophical positions unless the "atheist" is brought face to face with Jesus. (She was decidedly not an atheist, but an arrogant agnostic who refused to read a line of Christian apologetic material.) I gently evaded her attempts at a "you say but we say," point-counterpoint game of verbal badminton. I re-directed the conversation and asked her several times precisely what it was about Jesus that so offended her. She evaded my repeated question, and, then, I recalled that other scenario I had posed so many years earlier. I leaned forward a bit and asked: "What would you think if, at this moment, Jesus Christ Himself walked through that door," motioning to the door of my office. Her shoulders went back, her eyes flashed, her nostrils flared, her face flushed, and she said--in a strong voice, just short of a shriek: "Oh, my God; that would be *HORRIBLE!*"

He who is afraid to be alone with Jesus hates his own healing. And, anyway, to run is absolutely futile, as every fugitive from Him will discover. Francis Thompson wrote about that inevitable futility in his "The Hound of Heaven." "I fled Him," the poet said, "down the labyrinthine ways of my mind, and in the midst of tears I hid from Him...*under running laughter.*" He fled, he said, because, he thought "having Him I could have nothing beside." He concludes the poem by having God say, "You drove love from thee, who

drove (away) Me." *Every human will meet Jesus in the end, either cornered or caressed.*

All psychotherapists know of people who cannot bear intimacy. They all know, as well, that no flowers bloom in that desert. God knows there are people who are afraid of intimacy with Him and His Son and His Holy Spirit, and He also knows that the sole crop in that desert is a withered patch of weeds of death. To become vulnerable to any human inevitably produces pain at times, but all normal humans risk the pain in order to experience the enrichment such relationships produce. Such pain is manageable; isolation is not. *Through the centuries sociological and psychological types have contended that we are only fully human in relationship to other humans!* What makes intimacy with Jesus the richest of all life's experiences is simply this: He is the most human of all humans and He is fullest deity as well. He is the ultimate gentleman Who has never hurt or rejected any seeker of Him, in fact--in His very nature--*can* never reject or take advantage of any who come to Him. He is the ultimate fulfillment of all life's emotional and spiritual longings. Intimacy with Him is the safest and wisest and most elevating of all human experiences. The pastor who lives there not only experiences life's highest privilege and joy, he not only pleases the Father, *but he is, thereby, prepared to be a blessing to his world.*

Power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love....The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby give us hope are the true saints.

One thing is clear to me: the temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love. (21)

To put it succinctly and sufficiently: Tiberias was an event the redemptive effects of which will ripple with victories from that day beyond the far side of heaven because two men did not run away from each other, but toward each other. No man is in serious trouble until he has to say, as did a king of Israel, a fugitive from God for many years: "God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams nor by Urim." *No man ever spoke sadder words. God had forsaken him because he had forsaken God.* Grimly, and in disguise, realizing his throne is tottering and his days are running out, a stranger now to his God, Saul sneaks away to the village of Endor and--against an explicit law in Israel which demanded the death penalty for such things--enters the hovel of a medium seeking an answer to his dilemma. *If God will not give him counsel, perhaps a witch will!* He gets his answer from an unexpected source--the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. It is a message which literally prostrates him: "*Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me!*" Saul was decapitated the next day on Mt. Gilboa. His sons were slain, his army was in utter defeat and disarray, and his nation was subjugated to the enemy because of Saul's refusal to do what Peter was later to do--establish and foster a redemptive personal relationship with God! (I Samuel 28:5-19) The message of Tiberias and its counterpart, Endor? "Seek the LORD while He may be found!" (Isaiah

55:6) “Seek His face evermore.” (Psalm 109:4) “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16: 11) Why? Paul Tillich puts it this way: “*Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God.*” (22)

A final heartening word to all pastors from a celebrated university football coach: “Nobody’s tired on the day of victory!