

Pastor-Theologians Who Exalt Christ

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Steve Fernandez, Michael Jordan, and Jesus

I was only a few months into my role as middle school ministry director when Cliff McManis, my supervising pastor and mentor, drove me seventy-five miles north to Vallejo: a mid-size town on the San Pablo Bay, just northeast of San Francisco. We had been invited to The Cornerstone Seminary's inaugural celebration. Steve Fernandez, founding pastor of Community Bible Church and president of the new seminary, would bring the message on that night of joy, anticipation, and gratefulness for what the Lord had done.

Steve's sermon was out of John 1:1. After twenty years, it is difficult to recall many details from the sermon. I do remember, however, that Christ was the focal point of the message and Steve was passionate about his topic. Indeed, Steve was so fervent about preaching the glories of Christ that he wouldn't let Christ take second place to any man, including the greatest basketball player of all time. Again, the specifics are hazy, but I do remember some comment about Jesus dunking over Michael Jordan and Steve showing us exactly—on stage—how the Lord would hammer it home against M. J. From what I've heard, an overflowing passion for Jesus and animated preaching were typical for Steve. While that night in Vallejo would be the only time I saw Steve in person—I would eventually move to Kentucky for seminary and not return to the Bay Area until 2014 after Steve's death—I get the privilege of hearing about Steve on a regular basis.

About six years ago I started teaching at The Cornerstone Bible College and Seminary. Four years ago, I became the academic dean of the school. My colleagues include Steve's personal friends and relatives, so I get to hear the good stuff: stories of powerful preaching and hilarious sermon gaffes, his love for the church and his extraordinary ability to develop strategic, Christ-centered relationships for the sake of the gospel. Most important is the unanimous testimony of family and friends who knew Steve best: he was a man who, like Paul, longed to exalt Christ in life and in death (Phil 1:20).

The Cornerstone Bible College and Seminary is the fruit of Steve's passion for Christ. We desire to honor Steve's legacy by exalting Christ in all our teaching, training, and discipleship. Our prayer is that our Father would use us to equip pastor-theologians who exalt Christ.

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I

The Current State of Pastoral Ministry¹

While it may be difficult to believe in our current cultural setting, there was a time when the pastor was viewed as a town's leading intellectual. Pastors of what seems like a lost era were doctrinally grounded and biblically saturated, to be sure, but they were also well read in other important branches of study—literature, economics, politics, philosophy, and science—and were therefore able to apply biblical truth to these areas of inquiry with keen spiritual and intellectual skill, helping their people think theologically about major trends within the church and the greater society.

Most importantly, the pastor was a *theologian*. For the pastor to be a theologian meant that he was the person to whom one would turn for insight in perplexing doctrinal issues. It was the pastor who penned theological treatises that savored of both intellectual rigor and devotional wisdom. And it was the pastor who had command of any wider theological trends that may influence his people.

Today, however, the pastoral office is, at a popular level, no longer viewed in such categories. At worst, the title “pastor-theologian” is a contradiction, for to be a pastor is to be one whose primary work is people and their spiritual well-being. To be a theologian is to labor away from people among books, and mainly in the area of academic scholarship. The pastor-theologian, despite what history may tell us, appears to be an ecclesiastical impossibility in our current age.

This is due, at least partially, to the fact that the larger contemporary church has loaded the pastoral role with responsibilities and expectations that hinder if not prohibit the work of theology. The pastor is seen chiefly as a “leader, organization builder, administrator, coach, inspirer, endless problem solver, spiritual pragmatist, and so much more.”²

¹Sections I and II of this article were adapted from my article, “3 Reasons Every Pastor Needs to Be a Theologian,” at Southern Equip, May 8, 2018, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/3-reasons-every-pastor-needs-theologian/>.

²Owen Strachan, “Of Scholars and Saints,” in *The Pastor as Public Theologian* by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 70. Over two decades ago Haddon Robinson recognized the shift in how people generally viewed the pastoral office. Quoting Kyle Haselden, Robinson comments, “...the pastor comes across as a ‘bland composite’ of the congregation’s ‘congenial, ever helpful, ever ready to help boy scout; as the darling of the old laides and as sufficiently reserved with the young ones; as the father image for the young people and a companion to the lonely men; as the affable glad-hander at teas and civic club luncheons.” (*Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, second edition [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 18).

For a pastor to consider how he might engage in important doctrinal discussions and cultural issues, pursue some form of theological writing, and make scholarly contributions to the larger Christian academy is to indulge in pointless fantasy: his role and his time preclude these kinds of endeavors.

How the Enlightenment Changed Pastoral Ministry in Europe

But the popular reshaping of the pastoral role is also a symptom the massive rift that has slowly but surely formed over the past 300 years between the church and the academy. Due to the Enlightenment's (c. 1685–1815) detachment of biblical authority from rational inquiry,³ the contribution of the Christian pastor in any realm other than religion has slowly but surely diminished. As the Enlightenment's suspicion of authority pervaded Europe, Christian theology came to be viewed to function chiefly within the realm of "faith," while other areas of inquiry—especially science—functioned within the realm of "reason." Faith deals with that which is private and non-falsifiable. Reason trades on that which is public and empirical. Autonomous reason, unaided by divine revelation, would be valued as the primary means by which all people could arrive at universal knowledge.⁴

Theology, therefore, tended to be treated less as objective truth about the Creator and his ways and more as a collection of improvable propositions that have no authoritative bearing on other areas of study. The separation of faith and reason led inevitably to the detachment of the church and the academy. "Over the space of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson observe, "the universities [in Europe], which had been largely conceived and reared in service of the churches, gradually became institutions of the state."⁵ The sociological fruit of this institutional rending was that the pastor was now marginalized in terms of intellectual contribution to the greater society. The scholar, however, was lionized.

According to Hiestand and Wilson's account of this shift in Europe, however, theological study as a university discipline was preserved from total annihilation in Germany. "The study of Scripture and theology within the universities risked dying altogether, had both subject matters not been

³M. J. Inwood, "Enlightenment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford 1995), 236. Inwood notes this basic tenant of Enlightenment philosophers: "Beliefs are to be accepted only on the basis of reason, not the authority of priests, sacred texts, or tradition" (236).

⁴ See W. Andrew Hoffercker, "Enlightenments and Awakenings: The Beginning of Modern Culture Wars," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed., W. Andrew Hoffercker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 255.

⁵Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 44.

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repositioned within the German universities during the eighteenth century. The Germans, rather than dismissing the Bible, transformed the study of the Bible into an academic discipline—a precise textual science.”⁶ Nevertheless, the preservation of biblical and theological studies in Germany did not mean that these disciplines were pursued according to the biblical categories of inspiration and inerrancy. Enlightenment principles were assumed, and German scholars engaged Scripture as a “culturally important artifact” that was to be studied according to the same methodology as any other document of antiquity. “Ultimately, an academic view of Scripture eclipsed an ecclesial view of Scripture; the study of the Bible and theology within the university context has never been the same.”⁷ Broadly speaking, the pursuit of biblical studies and theology in the European university is conducted apart from any vital attachment to evangelical conviction. While exceptions to this rule exist, they are few and far between.

How The Pastoral Role Changed in North America

While not dismissing how the Enlightenment served to undermine the pastoral role in North America, Hiestand and Wilson note that the factors that led to the separation between the church and the academy are slightly different than in Europe. The three major features of colonial and post-colonial life that sharpened the divide between pastoral ministry and the work of theology were (1) urbanization; (2) the Revolutionary War; and (3) the development of divinity schools.⁸

Before the small and scattered towns of the fledging American colonies started to see significant population growth, it was usually the pattern that each town had one church with one pastor, with the church at the center of the town’s spiritual and social life. Because of this societal structure, the pastor’s engagement in and influence on the town’s religious and civic life would have been significant. The pastor would have likely been the most educated person in town, and training for the ministry would have taken place primarily within the ecclesial setting as young men learned theology and ministry skills from the pastor himself.⁹

The early nineteenth century, however, saw the establishment of several divinity schools in North America. Whereas theological education in colonial America previously was the domain of the local church, with the development of divinity schools the primary sphere for pastoral training was now located in an institution outside the church. “By the mid-nineteenth

⁶Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 45.

⁷Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 45.

⁸Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 46–49.

⁹Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 47.

century, the pastor theologian in North America had been replaced by the professor theologian.”¹⁰

The fracture between the role of the pastor and the work of the theologian has only widened and deepened since the separation began to take shape in Europe and North America over four centuries ago. But this development is neither healthy for the church nor institutions that specialize in theological education. As pastors increasingly view their role as managers, spiritual coaches, corporate executives, and social coordinators, and professional theologians drift further from the needs of the church into more refined areas of expertise (intelligible to only a handful of highly-trained scholars), both institutions will suffer, and so will the people who are instructed by them.

The developments over the past three centuries in both Europe and America have worked to undermine the pastoral role in two ways. First, the Enlightenment has questioned the very basis of evangelical theology and supplanted the pastor with the scholar. The pastor no longer is viewed as one who possesses vital knowledge about God, the nature of reality, anthropology, and human origins. These subjects are the domain of the academic who works from naturalistic assumptions rather than supernatural ones. The pastor offers non-provable spiritual claims that may or may not provide benefit to humanity, while the scholar produces empirically verifiable facts that serve immediate usefulness to the world at large. Thus, apart from serving as empathetic life-coach, the social necessity of the pastoral role is weakened because the substance of his labors is no longer seen as truth, but as mere “faith.”

Secondly, concerning developments in America, although there are many institutions in this country that are grounded in evangelical commitments and populate their faculty with scholars who share these same commitments, the pastor, by and large, is now sharply distinguished from the Christian scholar with the former’s role viewed less and less as a church’s local theologian and more and more as its organizational manager, spiritual guru, and weekly motivator. If you want some Bible teaching and spiritual pep talks, go to your pastor. If you want answers to snarly theological problems and cultural issues, contact the scholar.¹¹

¹⁰Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian* 49.

¹¹J. I. Packer recognizes this unfortunate distinction between pastor and professional theologian when he observes, “In this [academic] world of sustained intellectual activity, as in all circles of academic exchange, breadth, balance, acuteness of statement, and dialogical solidity of argument are the values primarily sought, so that the bearing of particular positions on the life of the people of God becomes a secondary interest. In other words, present-day theology is not pastoral and catechetical, and is not trained on the down-to-earth realities of life with Christ according to the Scriptures, and only deals with them incidentally, at a distance, and

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But the current sociological and institutional distinction of the pastor and theologian undermines the goal of Christian ministry because it removes the means for spiritual growth from the church (i.e., theology), and the purpose for theology from the academy (i.e., growth in Godward affections and conduct).

II Re-Establishing the Office of Pastor-Theologian in the Local Church

Having briefly surveyed historically how the pastoral role became detached from the work of theology, it is now time to consider the task of reinstalling pastor-theologians back into the local church. I say, “local church” and not just “church” as a universal entity because a reference only to the universal church doesn’t necessitate a change in much of the current ecclesial landscape. Professional evangelical theologians who labor primarily in the Christian academy serve the universal church as they instruct and serve Christians in their capacity as professor, but a sharp distinction between the work of the professional theologian and the pastor remains in place unless we designate the local church as the “native home of theology.”¹² In other words, the only place a pastor-theologian can labor is within the local church. But why attempt to re-establish the pastor as theologian in the local church? I will offer three reasons.

The Pastor-Theologian Model is Biblical

Because of its detachment from theology, the American church in many cases has grown spiritually weak, socially compromised, and susceptible to hazardous doctrinal trends. Likewise, due to a decreased interest in and connection with the genuine needs of Christ’s church, the Christian scholar is in danger of producing material of little spiritual and theological benefit for the most important institution in the world, the body of Christ. And what is most concerning about the present situation is that this cycle is self-perpetuating: unless something foundational changes in the culture of the church and the academy, the rupture between the pastor and theologian can *only* worsen as time goes on.

But for the sake of Christ’s bride, pastors—the ones tasked with the oversight of the church—cannot throw up their hands in resignation. We can, one church at a time, one pastor at a time, recapture the glorious office of the pastor-theologian for the glory of God and the eternal good of his people. We will be aided in this endeavor by first reminding ourselves that

usually in a somewhat fragmented way.” *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in our Walk with God*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 12.

¹²Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 77.

the model of pastor-theologian is *biblical*. It's not enough to point to historical precedent and start framing our vision around early church or seventeenth-century ideals. We have to first be convinced that God calls the pastor to be, first and foremost, a theologian and that Scripture provides the necessary framework within which he can ply his craft.

The Old Testament lays the foundation for the pastor-theologian model. Throughout the old covenant documents, the shepherding role is portrayed largely in terms of feeding God's flock through teaching and the steady provision of knowledge. "For the lips of the priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7). Such a role for the nation's spiritual leadership would be expected given the central place knowledge had in the life of the Israelite. The wise were characterized by their possession of knowledge (Prov 1:7; 2:10; 8:9; 11:9; 13:16; 24:4) while the foolish were so called due to their lack of it (Prov 1:29; 13:16). Economic prosperity notwithstanding, knowledge was the highest-valued commodity in Israel (Prov 8:9; 20:15), and neglect of knowledge would lead a person to temporal and eternal ruin (Prov 10:14; 12:1; 19:27). Indeed, Isaiah attributes the most devastating event in Israel's history to a lack of knowledge. "Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge" (Is 5:13), because a deficiency in knowledge lead to idolatry: "Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols" (Jer 10:14; cf. 51:17; Is 44:19).

Therefore, in contrast to the shepherds in Israel who neglected their calling to instruct God's people and fed only themselves (Ezek 34:8) and exhibited a woeful lack of knowledge (Is 56:10), God promised to raise up future New Covenant shepherds who would fill hungry spiritual bellies with divine truth. "And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15). When the Good Shepherd commenced his ministry in Israel, he came preaching and teaching (Matt 4:17; Luke 4:43) while gathering a group of disciples to whom he would entrust divine truth (John 14–16) so that they could feed God's people upon Jesus' departure. Jesus' last recorded exhortation to Peter prior to his ascension dealt specifically with Peter's task to provide Christ's flock with spiritual food (John 21:15–19).

After Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles would make the ministry of the Word their chief work within the church (Acts 6:2), giving themselves to preaching, teaching, and handling theological controversy (Acts 15:1–35). Even before we get to Paul's specific instructions to pastors on how they must conduct and prioritize their ministry, the very nature and structure of the New Testament books indicate that the work of theology is of primary importance for pastors. The New Testament gospels and epistles are characterized by careful, patient argumentation (Luke 1:1–4; Rom 1–8), painstaking exegesis (Hebrews), theological synthesis (Rom 9–11), attention to

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textual detail (Gal 3:15–17), and engagement with vital Christological issues (John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–18). Throughout the New Testament you find the apostles engaging with doctrinal controversy (Gal 1:1–4:30), settling of complex eschatological concerns (1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 2:1–12), reflecting on past covenantal structures for the sake of gospel clarity (Gal 3:15–29), grappling with apparent ontological conundrums in the area of sanctification (Rom 6:1–7:23), possessing a keen awareness of false doctrine (Col 2:1–23), and profitably using non-Christian literature to bolster their arguments (Acts 17:22–33).

It's become commonplace for Bible teachers to note how Paul's epistles are often divided into discernable doctrinal and practical sections, with the doctrinal sections laying the foundation for the practical segment. Ephesians, for example, is divided almost in half with theology dominating the first three chapters and practical instruction characterizing the latter three chapters (although there is some overlap).

But we shouldn't brush this observation off as some rudimentary principle we teach to new believers. No, the New Testament epistles provide the template around which the pastor is to build his approach to ministry. The pastoral life is a life of intense biblical and theological rigor integrated harmoniously with heart-felt passion for Christ and love for his sheep. Even without the pastor's job description outlined in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, the nature of New Testament content by itself should drive a pastor to see his role mainly in terms of theological shepherding. The pastor's work is, in large measure, a labor of knowledge acquisition and distribution. Yet, throughout the Scripture and particularly in the New Testament, this intellectual rigor is blended seamlessly with personal worship (Rom 11:33–36), deep concern for the spiritual welfare of believers (Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 2:11–12) and a longing for the salvation of unbelievers (Rom 9:1). The pastor-theologian is a whole man engaging whole people, as we will discuss in detail in the next section.

Given the state of contemporary pastoral ministry, however, it is necessary to return to Scripture to emphasize the pastor's calling as a theologian. Sadly, many churches are presently pastored by men who do not view their role in these terms and therefore give scant attention to careful exegesis, the study of systematic and historical theology, and the work of distinguishing between beneficial and harmful doctrinal trends. As a result, their preaching, teaching, and writing is riddled with theological error, shallow spiritual platitudes, and Christless self-help clichés.¹³ Though some of these churches appear to be thriving—they boast large budgets, massive

¹³This is not a generalization based on a personal hunch. See Colton Carter, “4 Reflections after Listening to 18 Hours of Sermons in America's Biggest Churches,” in *9 Marks Journal* (March 2020), 10–17.

attendance, and much activity—many of the people languish spiritually (Rev 3:1). The idol of self has replaced Christ because the knowledge of God is no longer a priority (Jer 10:14; 14:18; cf. Hos 6:6).

Yet, this discussion on the necessity of theological engagement does not imply that a pastor must be skilled in every conceivable branch of technical theology or broader areas of learning, although he should have some interest in these fields. Rather, to be a theologian is to first be concerned with the study, preservation, and proclamation of historic Christian doctrine at the local church level (1 Tim 1:3; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 4:2). The pastor is tasked with shepherding the flock among him (1 Pet 5:2), so his work of theology is first and foremost for his people. This labor will be expressed in preaching, teaching, discipleship, counseling, and writing as the pastor thinks carefully and rigorously how to apply the truth to his people in their present setting. But the very nature of this work requires that the pastor be well engaged with broader theological discussions and trends so that he can guard his people from what is wrong and unhelpful and inform his people of what is true and useful. We see this modeled by the authors of the New Testament epistles as their teaching dealt directly with contemporary false doctrine and false teachers (Gal 1:8–9; 3:1–2; 4:7; 2 Pet 2:1ff).

Practically, then, the pastor-theologian will keep his mind attuned to the ideas that are percolating at an academic level through regular reading, conference attendance, intentional research, and other means. Yet, this kind of study and research is no mere intellectual hobby for a pastor, even if he has a personal bent in the direction of academic study. A theologically indifferent pastor is like a ranch foreman who has no interest in the hunting behavior of wolves. He may prefer to avoid these subjects, but precious lives are at stake, so he must find a way to remain current with what's out there in the greater theological horizon.

The Pastor-Theologian Model is Historical

Second, we must see that the pastor-theologian model is *historical*. Although the pastoral role is no longer viewed, by and large, as the primary place where a theologian would ply his trade, the truth is that this recent trend is contrary to historical precedent. “Throughout most of the church’s history,” Hiestand and Wilson comment, “the pastoral vocation was a primary vocation for theologians and biblical scholars. One need only to think of history’s most important theologians to be reminded that the pastoral office was once compatible with robust theological scholarship.”¹⁴ But not only was the pastor viewed as a theologian; he would conduct his labor of theology within

¹⁴Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 22.

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the context of the local church and his ministerial duties. Owen Strachan explains:

[Early church pastors] did not separate from the people and the ministry to learn theology but instead tilled the rich soil of Scripture in the context of pastoral work. . . .it would have been unthinkable for these early pastors to give up the grind of weekly Bible exposition in order to sequester themselves in theological meditation to mine more deeply into the Bible's doctrine. On the contrary, reading the Bible for sermon preparation was itself an opportunity for real theological work, a glorious exegetical grind.¹⁵

Yet, when it was necessary, these pastor-theologians would engage rigorously with contemporary theological and cultural issues, expending significant energy and time to write, teach, even attend conferences in order to set things in order and give doctrinal aid to the greater church.

With varying degrees of consistency, this model of pastor-theologian held sway in the early and medieval church and through the Reformation. The Enlightenment, as we saw, successfully dismantled the connection between the pastor and the theologian for much of Europe and North America. But for most of church history, this was not the case. To recapture the ideal of pastor-theologian, therefore, is not only to reinstate the biblical model; it is to return to the historical one as well.

The Pastor-Theologian Model is Necessary

Third, we must see that the pastor-theologian is *necessary*. At root, a pastor is a preacher and teacher of Christian doctrine for his local congregation. He shepherds his people, in large measure, by attending to biblical exposition in the pulpit, the lectern, and the counseling session. His primary labor of theology, therefore, will be located in his weekly sermon preparations and in his teaching, preaching, writing, and counseling ministry. He will also take careful note of recent scholarship in order to protect his people from dangerous theological trends and to remain well informed of useful new resources for his people.

But the pastor-theologian is also necessary for the greater church. Beyond his labors among his immediate flock, the pastor-theologian should be encouraged to take his pastoral experience, intellectual rigor, and broad knowledge of various biblical and theological topics to the academy as well. So long as academic specialists are allowed to constantly refine and narrow their areas of expertise, they are in danger of losing a sense of the true nature and purpose of theology.

Indeed, some of the strangest theological statements I've heard have

¹⁵Owen Strachan, "Of Scholars and Saints," 71.

come from theologians who have so narrowed their scholarly interests that they've lost their grip on the whole counsel of God's Word or so sequestered themselves in their technical reflections that they have little awareness of the spiritual needs of ordinary Christians in the local church setting. The pastor-theologian, working primarily in and for the local church, can take his skill as a generalist and his insight as a shepherd of people to the guild to help Christian institutions of higher education produce better resources for the greater church.¹⁶

III The Pastor-Theologian: Recapturing the Vision of a Well-Balanced Ministry

But what does it look like to be a pastor-theologian? In this section we will consider what shape a ministry takes when a man is growing into a shepherd-scholar.

Despite the downward trend of so much contemporary pastoral ministry I have sketched above, there have been some positive developments among evangelical leaders the past four decades. John Piper is one example of a pastor who has labored intentionally to re-connect the twin roles of shepherd and theologian into a single pastoral office. For Piper, the pastoral office should be characterized by rigorous thinking, particularly over biblical texts,¹⁷ but also over theological synthesis and application.¹⁸ This intellectual rigor, however, is not an end in and of itself. Rather, deep theology and clear thinking are pursued for the sake of Godward affections and glad obedience.¹⁹ For the pastor, it is the task of regular preaching that keeps his

¹⁶Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 96. While my focus in this article is on the pastor, I should note that I do see great value in biblical and theological scholarship and in providing skilled scholars with the opportunity to devote themselves to sustained, in-depth study and academic production. For a well-argued and balanced case for evangelical scholarship and its motivation, see Andrew David Naselli, "Three Reflections on Academic Evangelical Publishing," in *Themelios*, 39.3 (2014): 428-54. But the biblical vision of ministry I've outlined above requires me to give preeminence to the church and the pastoral office. I believe, therefore, that professional Christian scholars will only fulfill their calling if they are (1) deeply rooted in the local church and engaged in vital ministry there; (2) deferential to the local church (not the academy) as the primary (not derivative) Christian institution; (3) laboring chiefly for the benefit of the church.

¹⁷John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2002), 73-79.

¹⁸John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sister, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 10-11.

¹⁹John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 33-37.

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theological pursuits in their proper order. It is not enough to carefully exegete Romans 9:1–23 for multiple weeks: God must be *proclaimed* from this text, not just analyzed.²⁰ It is vital for pastors to maintain this balance, especially those who have natural drift toward scholarship.

Many pastors, especially those who love the glorious vision of God’s being and beauty and plan of salvation, have a scholarly bent that threatens to over-intellectualize the Christian faith, which means they turn it mainly into a system to be thought rather than a way of life to be felt and lived. Of course, it is a system as well as a life. But the danger is that the whole thing can be made to feel academic rather than heart-wrenchingly real.²¹

But it’s also the case that groundless happiness doesn’t glorify God, either. There is a zeal that is not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2), that neither honors the Lord nor edifies his people.²² Hence, the faithful pastor is one who seeks to ground his people’s affections in biblical truth. The aim of rigorous theology and careful exegesis is a deep love for God and enjoyment of who he is for us in Jesus Christ. Merely stocking people’s minds with truth without helping them cultivate a genuine enjoyment of God leads inevitably to pride and a sterile, loveless Christianity that easily deceives the professing believer that they are growing spiritually simply because they are growing intellectually (1 Cor 8:1; Rev 2:4).

Unfortunately, in the attempt to reset the pastoral office into its theological footings, some men have overcorrected and now fail to give adequate attention to the affections and the necessity of good works in how they measure the spiritual growth and health of their people. But the mere ability to hear and mentally collect divine knowledge doesn’t necessarily equate to spiritual well-being (James 1:22).

The implication for the gospel minister, therefore, is that *he* must cultivate this kind of life and approach to biblical and theological study. It is not enough for an aspiring pastor-theologian to see the necessity of developing a well-balanced ministry for his people and to recognize that heart-change is the aim of pastoral preaching, teaching, and discipleship. In order for there to be a well-balanced *ministry*, there must be a well-balanced *man*. Recapturing the pastor-theologian model for the good of the local church, therefore, is

²⁰John Piper, “The Pastor as Scholar,” in *The Pastor as Scholar and The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 44–45. Piper’s study of Romans 9:1–23 in preparation to write his scholarly monograph, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), is one of the impetuses that led him to pastoral ministry.

²¹John Piper, “The Pastor as Scholar,” 49.

²²Piper, “The Pastor as Scholar,” 49–53.

first a call to recapture the pastor-theologian himself.

A pastor-theologian is one who is, first, qualified to be a pastor according to the character qualities listed in the pastoral epistles (1 Tim 3:1-8; Titus 1:5–9). But it is possible for a man to be godly yet not have the requisite skill with which to carry out a well-balanced ministry that combines scholarly rigor and deep love for God and his people. He must first, as Albert Martin notes, “strive to maintain a real, expanding, varied, and original acquaintance with God and his ways.”²³ Martin continues,

As glorious and memorable, or as undramatic and almost imperceptible, were our original saving dealings with God and His ways, these dealings will not suffice to sustain a ministry that is marked by the unction of the Spirit of God in a life of growing intimacy and expanding acquaintance with the triune God of the Bible...Our expanding acquaintance with God and His ways must not be sterile or wooden.²⁴

In order for a pastor’s theological labors to remain spiritually beneficial to his people and the greater church, he must be actively pursuing a heart-felt walk with Christ. But for the pastor-theologian, this heart-felt walk with Christ is to be pursued *through* study, not in opposition to it. Martin explains,

...it is possible that a man of God may experience a good measure of a humble walk with God along with the necessary intellectual exercises involved in such a walk, and yet fall short of his maximum potential for usefulness because of intellectual sterility, laziness, or a lack of general intellectual discipline. There is a sense in which a man may indeed be determined in his heart to love God wholly, but who is not prepared with equal diligence to love God with all his mind.²⁵

Crafting, planning, and implementing a deliberate strategy for theological growth, therefore, is essential for the pastor-theologian. (I will talk specifically about strategies below.)

Theological Excellence and the Problem of “Intellectual Respectability”

To heed the call to be a pastor-theologian, however, does not mean that faithful shepherds are seeking the approval of a larger guild of scholars. The

²³Albert Martin, *The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life* (Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018), 236.

²⁴Martin, *The Man of God*, 239.

²⁵Martin, *The Man of God*, 283.

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pursuit of what Iain Murray calls, “intellectual respectability” is a futile venture that inevitably leads to theological compromise.²⁶ As Carl Trueman has noted,

It remains true (as James Barr pointed out years ago) that evangelical academics are generally respected in the academy only at precisely those points where they are least evangelical. There is a difference between academic or scholarly respectability and intellectual integrity. For a Christian, the latter depends upon the approval of God and is rooted in fidelity to his revealed Word; it does not always mean the same thing as playing by the rules of scholarly guild.²⁷

Specifically, evangelical pastor-theologians must be careful that they do not mistake the assumption of naturalistic, historical-critical dogmas for rigorous thinking. What do I mean?

As we noted above, the Enlightenment not only occasioned the separation of twin roles that God designed to reside in the same office, but it also challenged the very foundations of evangelical theology so that historic Christian doctrine was no longer broadly assumed to be true. These epistemological reverberations are felt to this day. The intellectual air we breathe is infused with settled doubt over the veracity of Scripture and the validity of Christian theology so that even evangelical theologians show signs of infection. For example, some evangelical scholars imply by their arguments that the refusal to accept an evolutionary framework for

²⁶Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change from 1950–2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001), 173–214. See also John Frame “Inerrancy: A Place to Live,” in *The Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* vol 57, number 1 (2014): 36. Frame comments, “Respectability is a major issue here. Our desire to raise the quality of our academic standards is a godly desire. Our desire to be academically respectable usually is not, though it is hard to separate the good desire to meet higher standards. The apostle Paul does say that a church elder should be ‘well thought of by outsiders’ (1 Tim 3:7; cf. 1: Thess 4:12). But the quest for respectability, a frequent quest in the history of Christian thought, is often motivated by ungodly pride. Avoiding that is where the armor of God comes in, where we need to walk in the Spirit.” See also Naselli, “Three Reflections,” 433-38.

²⁷Carl Trueman, “The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind,” in *9 Marks Journal* (January/February 2010): 10–12.

understanding human origins is unscientific,²⁸ or that the idea of an inerrant Scripture is untenable in light of historical-critical scholarship.²⁹

If such is the case among even some professing evangelical theologians, pastors will be ever tempted to yield to what the larger academy deems reasonable and rational. A faithful pastor-theologian, therefore, will be one who settles it in his mind—and resettles it every day—that he beholden to Scripture as the supreme source of theological knowledge and that his mental labor is for the glory of God and the benefit of the church, not the accolades of the academy. Rejection, ridicule, and ostracization from professing evangelical and non-evangelical theologians alike will be the normal portion of the faithful pastor-theologian. While it may not ring with sophistication, the path to theological excellence is through the cross and a deep-seated, Spirit-wrought commitment to please Christ above all, come what may (see Gal 1:10).

Pride, therefore, cannot be allowed to take root in the life of an aspiring pastor-theologian.³⁰ The danger of emphasizing the biblical call for a shepherd to steep himself in God-centered theology is that knowledge, if not joined with humility and love, has the *tendency* to puff up (1 Cor 8:1). This propensity is not the fault of the knowledge itself: genuine knowledge of God is the greatest of all gifts (Jer 9:23–24). The fault lies with our sinful hearts that are prone to take *any* good gift—gifts that are given for the express purpose of bringing glory to God—and twist it to exalt ourselves. But Scripture warns us repeatedly that the pursuit of personal glory and the praise of man disables us from rightly understanding and interpreting Scripture. In other words, if you're pining after the approval of other theologians and a guild of world-renowned scholars, you will likely find yourself in a doctrinal ditch, bringing ruin to yourselves and to your hearers, just like the religious leaders in Jesus' time.³¹

²⁸Denis O. Lamoureux, "No Historical Adam: Evolutionary Creation View," in *Four Views on Historical Adam*, eds., Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 37–65.

²⁹Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

³⁰Just over sixty years ago J. I. Packer noted that Christians may still be tempted to reject the teaching of God's Word due to pride. "And when men become Christians, they are still prone in their pride to lapse into the assumption that there is no rationality or wisdom in merely taking their Creator's word; they are still apt to demand that their reason be permitted to make its own independent assessment of what He says and to have the last word in deciding whether it is credible or not." See *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 138

³¹Jonathan Edwards offers this sharp warning to any Christian who pursues divine knowledge for the sake of applause. "Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the

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The Pharisees and scribes possessed every resource they needed to fulfill their role as Israel's pastor-theologians. They had the written Word of God, they had the time and a generally peaceful setting with which to study its contents, and they had the opportunity to teach that Word to the people in their nation. When the Messiah stood in their presence, however, they did not recognize him or grasp that this Man was presently fulfilling the very Scripture they had given their lives to studying. "You search the Scriptures," Jesus told them, "because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40).

What was the problem? Jesus follows his observation about their study habits with a jarring statement: "I do not receive glory from people" (John 5:41). While at first glance this statement seems out of place, it answers the question of why they had refused to come to Jesus: the religious leaders sought glory from people. They loved the praise and accolades of men. Elsewhere, Jesus characterized the scribes and Pharisees as people dominated by the need for man's approval: "They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others" (Matt 23:5–7; cf. Matt 6:1–12).

Jesus, conversely, was characterized by declining personal glory for the sake of pursuing his Father's fame. For this reason, Jesus was unattractive to the religious leaders and would be quickly replaced by another Messiah if that Savior exalted himself and coddled the Pharisees' desire for personal glory. "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him" (John 5:43). The root problem for these religious leaders was that their pursuit of man's approval clouded their eyes and kept them from rightly understanding Scripture. In other words, pride made faith in Jesus impossible: "How can you believe," Jesus asks rhetorically, "when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God" (John 5:44)? The answer, of course, is that they were unable to believe in Christ so long as they treasured the praise of men.

benefit of your souls, and in order to practice. If applause be your end, you will not be so likely to be led to the knowledge of the truth, but may justly, as often is the case of those who are proud of their knowledge, be led into error to your own perdition. This being your end, if you should obtain much rational knowledge, it would not be likely to be of any benefit to you, but would puff you up with pride. *1 Corinthians 8:1*, "Knowledge puffeth up." See "The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth," in *Works*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 162–63.

While Jesus' comments were directed at the Pharisees' unconverted condition, the principle holds true for Christian pastors as well: our faith in Jesus and thus our ability to rightly interpret and apply Scripture will be obstructed by any cultivation of our pride. God only leads the humble in what is right (Ps 25:9) and only looks upon the one who trembles at his Word (Isa 61:1–2). Our desire for prominence among a cadre of international scholars—or simply among the pastor-theologians in nearby churches—must be crucified again and again if we hope to grow spiritually, feed Christ's flock, and persevere in the ministry. Jonathan Edwards aptly warns us: "Pride is the main handle by which [Satan] has hold of Christian persons and the chief source of all the mischief that he introduces to clog and hinder a work of God. Spiritual pride is the main spring or at least the main support of all other errors. *Until this disease is cured, medicines are applied in vain to heal all other diseases.*"³² Dealing with our sinful bent for personal glory is not a discipline we begin in latter stages of our work: it is the beginning, middle, and end of pastoral ministry. Without Spirit-wrought humility leading to a love for Christ and a love for his sheep, our theological efforts will come to nothing (James 4:6).

But it should be obvious by now that none of our discussion on the problem of intellectual respectability implies that the pastor-theologian will be excused for intellectual sloppiness. Poorly reasoned doctrinal positions, superficial engagement with opposing theological opinions, hurried exegesis, and unsubstantiated arguments cannot be waived simply because one is a pastor. The very idea that the pastoral office justifies mental carelessness and theological ineptitude is itself a sign of the times. We will do well to remember that the word "pastor" in the phrase "pastor-theologian" is intended to identify the primary beneficiary of the theologian's intellectual labor (i.e., Christ's sheep), not serve as a hedge for a lazy man who is unwilling to apply mental rigor to his calling.³³

Indeed, the church only suffers when pastors neglect this aspect of their calling. Consider the troubles spawned by the Keswick movement.³⁴ These

³²Jonathan Edwards, "Undiscerned Spiritual Pride," in *Works*, 1:399; emphasis added.

³³One way that pastors can relate positively to the academy is by allowing current scholarship to sharpen their own thinking and theological arguments, even if that scholarship is trending in an unorthodox direction.

³⁴Andrew David Naselli defines the Keswick movement in the following way: "Keswick is a small town in the scenic Lake District of northwest England. Since 1875, it has hosted a weeklong meeting in July for the Keswick Convention.... 'the early Keswick movement' refers to a movement from 1875 to 1920 that was (1) conservatively evangelical; (2) based on and distinguished by the belief that the majority of Christians are living in defeat and that the secret to living the victorious Christian life is consecration followed by Spirit-filling; and (3) stimulated by annual

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problems, in large measure, were the fruit of the movement's emphasis on "experience at the expense of doctrine,"³⁵ as Andrew David Naselli explains:

Robert Pearsall Smith helped set the tone when he led a higher life meeting: "We did not come to Oxford to set each other right, or to discuss doctrines." Hannah Whitall Smith used the same tone by opening her most influential work—which addresses the deeply theological issue of progressive sanctification—with a disclaimer that downplays theology and appeals to experience.³⁶

Naselli then quotes a Keswick historian who claims that, "Keswick is interested in the practical application of religious truth rather than in doctrinal or dogmatic theology. The [Keswick] Convention is not interested in academic discussions of theology and ethics, or even in adding to the store of Bible knowledge of those who attend, but simply and only in helping men to be holy."³⁷ While a statement like this may initially sound attractive to well-intentioned Christians who want to grow in holiness but don't want to become mired in overly-technical doctrinal discussions and debates, it actually serves to undermine the Christian's pursuit of sanctification. Naselli continues, quoting J. I. Packer, "Perhaps this... is the very unconcern that has caused the trouble. After all, Pelagianism is the natural heresy of zealous Christians who are not interested in theology."³⁸ To emphasize application at the neglect of doctrinal foundations removes the basis of and guidance for the practical component of Christianity.

What is required of the pastor is not that he yield to assumed academic dogmas that run counter to Scripture, but that he become a clear thinker who is growing in his capacity to view all of life through the lens of Scripture (2 Tim 2:7; Rom 12:1–2). A faithful theologian is one who thinks hard and carefully over Scripture and its application within the parameters provided by historic Christian doctrine. A theologian, then, is not someone who embraces naturalistic assumptions about Scripture: he is simply someone who thinks

conventions at Keswick, England, and literature by its propagators." See "Keswick Theology: A Survey and Analysis of the Doctrine of Sanctification in the Early Keswick Movement" in *DBSJ* 13 (2008): 17–18.

³⁵Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, Where It's Going, and Why It's Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 87.

³⁶Naselli, *No Quick Fix*, 87.

³⁷Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1952), 42, 108; quoted in Naselli, *No Quick Fix*, 88.

³⁸J. I. Packer, "Keswick and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification," *Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (1955): 167; quoted in Naselli, *No Quick Fix*, 88.

hard about the Bible from historic evangelical foundations and applies its truth to all of life.

IV

A Pastor-Theologian in Practice: John Calvin and the Doctrine of Justification

John Calvin called the doctrine of justification “the main hinge on which religion turns.”³⁹ But it is not enough for the pastor to know the basics of this doctrine. His calling requires that he go continually deeper into this doctrine, teasing out its implications against the backdrop of current and historic challenges—not so that he can impress with intellectual sophistication, but so that his people’s spiritual vision remain uncluttered by the often-subtle distortions of the heretic.

In this way we can see how vital it is for the twin roles of pastor and theologian to remain firmly fixed in one office. The heart of the pastor desires that his people walk in the joy and freedom of the gospel (Gal 4:18-20; 5:1). But his people’s joy depends upon the clarity with which they behold Christ *in* the gospel. If that faith in Christ is darkened by even the smallest distortion in their understanding of justification, their faith will be hindered, and the Spirit will be stifled from working in their lives. And when this Spirit is stifled, the believer is left powerless against the flesh (Gal 5:16–21) and unable to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23).

This kind of spiritual obstruction is precisely what was occurring in the Galatian churches (Gal 3:1–5). Paul’s response, therefore, was a passionate yet carefully argued defense of justification that offered both simple articulation of the doctrine’s basic tenants (Gal 2:16) as well as in-depth analysis of Old Testament texts and covenantal structure (Gal 3:7–4:31) in order to move the Galatians back to believing in Jesus Christ alone for their right standing with God. It was not enough for the apostle to merely repeat the fundamental truths of justification: he had to meet the Judaizer’s challenges head-on and overturn their false teaching with deep theology and a lengthy argument that settled once and for all that the Galatians were children of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ.

But Paul’s theological rigor had a practical goal for the Galatians. His inquiry into the Old Covenant and his defense of justification by faith led naturally to his discussion of walking in the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The endgame for Paul’s foray into exegesis, textual analysis, and theological synthesis was the happiness and holiness of the Galatians. Freedom, joy, love, personal character, humility, and perseverance in well-doing follow in the wake of sound theology (see Gal 5:16–6:10).

³⁹John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.1.

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The challenges to justification have not subsided since Paul's passionate epistle to the fledgling churches in modern-day Turkey. The challenges continued throughout the early church, as we see Paul expositing the doctrine at length in Romans and defending related soteriological elements in his other epistles. While there were flashes of insight and careful articulation of the doctrine of justification in the post-apostolic, imperial, and medieval church,⁴⁰ it was the Reformation that sparked exponential growth for the doctrine as Martin Luther and then John Calvin labored to articulate the biblical truths of justification in the context of the Roman Catholic sacramental system.

Like Paul, the Reformers' theological rigor had a pastoral goal. Europe had been under the spiritual burden of the Roman Catholic Church's sacramental system for centuries. The practical fallout of this merit-based soteriology was a laity whose consciences were loaded with the unrelieved fear of divine judgment due to the ineffectiveness of the system to provide assurance of peace with God. Even for Luther, his meticulous pouring over biblical texts and theological treatises was a matter of spiritual life and death, not scholarly one-upmanship. Calvin, quoted earlier, recognized that the spiritual health of the church is dependent upon her grasp of the doctrine of justification. Their insights into the doctrine were compelled by pastoral concern and shaped by intellectual intensity.

Consider the depth of insight into justification that Calvin discovered as he wrestled with Roman Catholic doctrine while plundering Scripture and the theological resources he had at hand. For example, in his aim to not allow faith to be mistaken as an evangelical work that earned us God's favor, Calvin added life-giving nuance to his argument for justification. Michael Horton comments,

At the same time, Calvin was concerned to keep faith from being perceived as the "one work" that we can perform in order to merit our justification. In itself, faith is nothing; its efficacy lies in its object, the person to whom it clings. Faith itself is imperfect, "for the mind is never so illuminated, but that many relics of ignorance remain; the heart is never so strengthened, but that much doubting cleaves to it." Faith is partial and weak, so if we are justified by faith itself, our case would be as hopeless as if we merited faith by our works.⁴¹

⁴⁰Nate Busenitz, *Long Before Luther: Tracing the Heart of the Gospel from Christ to the Reformation* (Chicago: Moody, 2017).

⁴¹Michael Horton, *Justification*, vol. 1, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2018), 214; Horton is quoting from Calvin's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.

This insight, though seemingly abstruse, has serious pastoral purchase. If faith itself (rather than Christ) is our righteousness, we are undone. How can we have any assurance if God looks upon our faith as meritorious? Our faith is often weak, half-hearted, and easily swayed. Without Calvin's insight about the nature of saving faith, believers are ever-tempted to rely upon themselves, even if they make an evangelical profession.

Along with the need to articulate with clarity the nature of faith and how it functioned in salvation, the controversy with the Roman Catholic Church required Calvin to emphasize the doctrine of union with Christ. Calvin's recourse to this biblical category enabled him to maintain the soteriological connection between justification and sanctification while making important distinctions between them. Against the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin argued that justification was strictly forensic and occurred at the moment of faith.⁴² When a person puts his faith in Christ, in the courtroom of heaven, God declares the sinner righteous with regard to his law, not by a legal fiction, but because Christ's righteousness has been imputed to the sinner's account, not infused into the sinner's soul.⁴³ This declaration of righteousness is fixed and unchanging.⁴⁴ Sanctification, the inevitable result of justification but distinct from it, consists of inward renewal that occurs over the sinner's lifetime but will not be completed until the believer dies and enters heaven.⁴⁵ Both elements of salvation are essential—leave one out and you don't have Christianity. But confuse or conflate them, and you likewise end up with something less than the gospel.

The doctrine of union with Christ draws these two aspects of salvation under one coherent theological category. Understood within the framework of union with Christ, each doctrine can be distinguished and simultaneously upheld in its theological and practical fullness.⁴⁶ How a sinner partakes in these two benefits of Christ also remains the same due to our union with Christ. Horton explains,

Union with Christ does not provide a basis for God's discerning in us a righteousness imparted; rather, on the basis of justification we

⁴²Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.2, 16, 19.

⁴³Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.2–4, 11.

⁴⁴Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.16; III.13.3.

⁴⁵Calvin, *Institutes*, III.14.9.

⁴⁶J. Todd Billings says it well: "On the one hand, this 'sum' of the gospel points to a thread that runs through much of Calvin's doctrinal work: the double grace of union with Christ is a simple, yet expansive description of salvation, for it incorporates forensic and transformational images of salvation together, without absorbing one category into the other." See "John Calvin's Soteriology: On the Multifaceted 'Sum' of the Gospel," in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11.4 (October 2009): 428.

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partake of Christ's vivifying life. The same act of faith that looks to Christ alone for justification looks to Christ alone for sanctification and glorification. The Christian life does not have two sources: one forensic and found in Christ alone and one moral and found in us.⁴⁷

By maintaining that justification and sanctification come to the believer through the same conduit—namely, faith in Christ—we avoid the Galatian problem of starting with the Spirit by faith (justification) but pursuing growth in holiness (sanctification) by works (Gal 3:3). But we can't stop probing into this doctrine quite yet. In order to keep justification from mixing with sanctification under the heading of union with Christ, we must also clarify the order by which union with Christ occurs and its relation to justification. Horton continues, "Forensic justification through faith alone is the fountain of union with Christ in all of its renewal. We are justified through faith, not through union with Christ."⁴⁸ Is this unnecessary, overly-nuanced theological hair-splitting that creates a distinction without a difference? Not if, according to Paul, it is essential to maintain that God justifies the *ungodly* by faith (Rom 4:5). Horton again:

According to classic Reformed treatments of this connection, Christ alone—his incarnation, obedient life, death, resurrection, and ascension—is the *basis* both for justification and union, but the act of justification is logically prior to union. Nevertheless, Calvin concludes, once justification has provided the legal ground, all the gifts of God's grace are freely given in union with Christ.⁴⁹

Justification—God's declaration that the believing sinner is righteous on the basis of Christ' life, death, and resurrection—is the legal ground for union with Christ and our reception of all his benefits, including sanctification. When the sinner places faith in Christ, God imputes to his account the perfect righteousness of Christ. The sinner, though still ungodly at the moment of justification, now possesses the legal right to enjoy all the spiritual blessings that union with Christ has to offer. But if we don't maintain the proper order of justification by faith *as the grounds of* union with Christ, it is possible to view union with Christ, *with* the benefit of sanctification as providing the legal basis for our justification. Once sanctification is allowed to contribute to our right standing with God, we are left vulnerable to a doctrine of justification similar to the Roman Catholic Church where justification is conflated with sanctification and the believer's assurance is cut

⁴⁷Horton, *Justification*, 1:215.

⁴⁸Horton, *Justification*, 1:215.

⁴⁹Horton, *Justification*, 1:219.

at the root. Entrance into right standing with God comes by faith in Christ alone. Lose this, and you've lost everything else.

With this important nuance, Calvin could answer the Roman Church's claim that his view of justification makes good works superfluous and of no importance in the life of the Christian. "On the contrary," Horton explains, "[justification] frees us to obey God and serve our neighbor without the ear of punishment for our short-comings. Justification in no way depends on the impartation of Christ's righteousness through union, yet the two are inseparable."⁵⁰ Calvin observes,

This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works. We have a ready explanation for doing this, provided we turn to Christ to whom our faith and direct and from whom it receives its full strength.⁵¹

When pastor-theologians protect *sola fide* from the encroachment of works in relation to justification, they are not merely upholding a confessional standard; they are supplying believers with source of unflagging joy and love to serve his neighbor and pursue good works for the benefit of others. This order of free justification providing the basis and impetus for good works is *the* structure of New Testament religion, and Calvin knew that compromise at this point left the church defenseless to a myriad of other deadly theological intrusions.

The care with which Calvin engaged the theological controversies of the day and the insights he produced from his close attention to Scripture amidst these controversies demonstrates the necessity for pastors to embrace their calling as theologians. Spiritual vitality and eternal destinies hung upon what many today would view as an unnecessary distinction between justification and sanctification. Calvin knew this, and the deeper he went into the battle, the more clearly he saw that robust, detailed theology derived from Scripture and careful synthesis was the *answer*, not the problem.

Within the last forty years, the doctrine of justification has seen a fresh set of challenges. While this article is not the place to answer these challenges in the depth and breadth they require, it is essential to remind ourselves that the same kind of spiritual confusion that afflicted the Galatians and the medieval church threatens to afflict us and darken our sight of Christ and the gospel. Following the example of Calvin, pastors must embrace their calling as theologians and face these challenges head-on. The academic ruminations of scholars inevitably make their way into popular Christian literature and living. Imperceptibly, Christians without courageous pastor-theologians to

⁵⁰ Horton, *Justification*, 1:216.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.1; cited in Horton, *Justification*, 1: 216.

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feed and warn them will imbibe seemingly harmless ideas that undermine evangelical faith and eventually undo their assurance altogether. Calvin teaches pastors to take our post as the church's theologian and labor diligently for the good of the flock.

V

Growing as a Pastor-Theologian

Now that we've considered the necessity of the pastor-theologian, developed a vision for what a well-balanced ministry should look like, and tasted of the spiritual fruit that is produced by careful pastoral attention to theological issues, we are now ready to think practically about how to tend to our calling. How do we grow as pastor-theologians?

Because we are all at different places along the spectrum—some of us are so people-oriented we find it hard to conceive of our role as involving rigorous theological work, while some of us have a bent toward study that sometimes leads us away from the hard work of shepherding the flock—we have to enter this phase of the discussion with some healthy self-knowledge. To what side of road are we more likely to run off into the ditch?

We also need to reckon with our gifts and present stewardship. By returning us to the pastor-theologian model, I am not suggesting that all pastors will engage the work of theology in the same way or in the same proportion. God has granted some men gifts that enable them to reach beyond their local congregation. Writing gifts, a capacity for in-depth academic research, and other related skills may enable some pastors to produce theological material for the greater church and Christian academy while they faithfully shepherd their own flock. Others will labor theologically chiefly for their local church without making contributions to a wider audience. And a host of other providential factors will come in to play as well: church size, location, and available staff are just a few aspects of local church life that will determine how much time and energy a pastor can devote to outside theological engagement.

Not every pastor is called to be a widely-known theological leader,⁵² but every pastor is called to be a theologian—a shepherd who thinks deeply and carefully over Scripture and biblical doctrine, who has a solid and growing grasp of systematic and historical theology, who is aware of important theological trends, and who is able to accurately convey and apply the whole counsel of God to his people. That's all of us. So, how can we grow in this grand calling? I will offer ten encouragements.

⁵²Douglas Sweeney, "A Call and Agenda for Pastor-Theologians," at The Gospel Coalition, April 26, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-call-and-agenda-for-pastor-theologians/>.

Walk Closely with the Lord

Of first importance in our growth as pastor-theologians is our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. We labor in vain if we labor without Christ, and all our efforts will turn to sand if we neglect our relationship with Jesus. “Apart from me,” Jesus reminds us, “you can do nothing” (John 15:6). Again, this kind of exhortation may not ring with intellectual savvy, but the pastor-theologian is shaped by a cross, not an academic culture. Theological study will go awry and ministry effectiveness will vanish if a pastor doesn’t give first attention to himself and his walk with God (1 Tim 4:15–16). Many in our day are offering tools and processes to enhance our productivity—many of which are genuinely helpful—but there is a biblical order to productivity that cannot be circumvented by the latest smartphone app or daily routine. “We are likely to accomplish much,” Charles Spurgeon observes, “when we are in the best spiritual condition.”⁵³ In other words, first concern yourself with your walk with the Lord and pastoral productivity will occur naturally and in the right proportion. Above all, treasure Jesus in your pastoral and theological labors.

Embrace a Life of Strenuous and Constant Labor

While sexual scandals and financial malfeasance inevitably throw the pastoral ministry into disrepute, lazy pastors are just as guilty for besmirching the shepherding office. “Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys” (Prov 18:9), Solomon warns. One reason why some pastors resist the idea of rigorous theological engagement is because it requires a lot of hard work. But we can’t abide such an excuse. The pastor is called to set an example for the flock in his conduct (1 Tim 4:12), and work-ethic is certainly included in this calling. As a *Christian*, the pastor should desire to exercise diligence in his work and to pursue excellence in his craft (Prov 12:24; 13:4; 21:5; 22:29; 28:19). As a *pastor*, he should desire to labor assiduously among God’s people because the nature of his work has eternal implications for himself and his people (1 Tim 4:16).

As we’ve noted already in this article, much of pastoral ministry is intellectual work: study, meditation, reading, writing, teaching, preaching. The pastor is tasked with the protection and promulgation of sound doctrine which requires that he toil long in Scripture and in other books, thinking carefully over biblical texts, theological problems, and pastoral application. These responsibilities require serious mental effort, but the pastor-theologian must be up to the task. Drawing from Old Testament precedent, Paul described the pastoral life as a life of strenuous effort. “For this end we *labor and strive*” (1 Tim 4:10; emphasis added), he told Timothy. The apostle characterized the pastoral role, particularly the elements of teaching and preaching, as “labor” (1 Tim 5:17; cf. 5:12; 1 Thess 2:9; 3:5). If you are not

⁵³Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 7.

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ready to work hard in preaching and teaching, you are not ready to be a pastor-theologian, which means you are not ready to be a pastor.

Hearing this admonition, however, some pastors will be tempted to replace intentional diligence with reactive busyness and fool themselves (and their people) that they are working hard when they are really just yielding to tyranny of the urgent. Rather than attending to their God-given priority of theological shepherding, they fill their schedules with meetings, phone calls, administrative requests, and other demands that make them to appear diligent but that actually shield them from the strenuous mental labor required for their role. The pastor-theologian, while never neglecting personal, hands-on care for the flock, carefully balances his schedule and commitments so that he can give adequate, distraction-free time to study, pray, read, and meditate over Scripture and sound doctrine.

Go Deep into the Bible

The primary quarry to which the pastor-theologian must give his time and energy is the Bible. The Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore demand our utmost attention. While we must thank God for and make good use of the many resources he has provided to help us understand the Bible, nothing can replace sustained time spent in the text. Scripture refers to this sustained time the text as “meditation,” and it is the methodological key to unlocking Scripture’s truth and enabling us to obey it. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, *so that* you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh 1:8; emphasis added; cf. Ps 1:2). Paul instructed young pastor Timothy to think over what the apostle had written because it was through the process of thinking that God would provide illumination and insight (1 Tim 2:7).

Yet, how easy it is to neglect intense, careful, focused study of Scripture because we are drawn away by secondary resources too quickly. John Piper reminds us, “If we are going to feed our people, we must ever advance in our grasp of Biblical truth....But several strong forces oppose our relentless and systematic interrogating of Biblical texts. One is that it consumes a great deal of time and energy on one small portion of Scripture.”⁵⁴ In truth, we may find it *easier* to read commentaries or other books than to dwell long over biblical texts in the attempt to discover their meaning. We may sense a need to relieve the burden of unresolved questions as quickly as possible, so we turn to outside helps rather than wrestling with the text until we can see for ourselves what it’s saying and how it synthesizes with other biblical texts. But it is difficult to see how such quick recourse to other resources can deepen our first-hand conviction one what Scripture teaches.

⁵⁴Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, 74–75.

Counter-intuitively, this robust, first-hand acquaintance with Scripture doesn't inhibit freshness or creativity in our preaching, teaching, and theological labors.⁵⁵ Actually, we will find that dealing primarily with the Bible will make our thinking clearer, sharpen our ability to engage with variant interpretations, enable us to develop useful pedagogical outlines and categories from the Scriptures themselves, and help us provide our people with deep insight into God's Word. It is for this reason that Martin Luther said, "He who is well acquainted with the Scripture is a distinguished theologian."⁵⁶ Growing as a pastor-theologian, therefore, begins with a renewed commitment to Scripture as our primary source for the knowledge of God.

Read

But immediately after emphasizing the importance of spending time in the text to see God's Word for ourselves, we must underscore the necessity of theological reading. The Scriptures exhort us to find and secure teachers to help us understand God's Word and grow in wisdom: ironically, to neglect these resources would be unbiblical. Furthermore, books supplement our deficiencies in knowledge that we can't supplement on our own while also protecting us from interpreting Scripture in isolation from the greater church. Given our limited time and the focus to which we must dedicate to the study of Scripture and our pastoral work, it a mark of wisdom to locate the best resources to supply what is lacking in our knowledge. Good books help us to better understand Scripture, but they also inform us of wider societal trends and theological developments within the church and academy.⁵⁷ Useful books help us think carefully through nettlesome doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues while also providing us rich illustrations for our preaching, teaching, and writing. We ignore theological reading to our pastoral peril.

But to make progress in our reading, we must craft a plan that outlines what we will read and when we will read. The pressures of pastoral life will ever tempt us to neglect theological reading for immediate concerns. While we cannot ignore hands-on care for the sheep, we must also be wary of allowing the whims of each day to dictate our schedules. There are emergencies in ministry, and our shepherding work will always require regular

⁵⁵See John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 99.

⁵⁶See Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, 93.

⁵⁷Used judiciously, social media can provide insight into theological and ecclesial trends as well. Debates over eternal Trinitarian relations, the nature of the church, and Christian Nationalism in the last few years have all been largely conducted and promoted on social media. But social media is also fraught with dangers as well, as I outline below.

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personal engagement with our people. But to become a pastor-theologian, we must apply dogged intentionality to maintain a steady course of biblical study, meditation, and theological reading. “Practice these things,” Paul exhorted Timothy, “immerse yourself in them, that all may see your progress” (1 Tim 4:15).

With regard to content, my recommendation is to begin with prayerfully⁵⁸ considering in what areas you should be reading. Determining factors may include current and future teaching, burgeoning theological and societal trends, personal theological interests, and discipleship concerns in your local setting. Secondly, I would recommend reading in topic “stacks.” Rather than reading just one book on a given topic, choose three on that issue and make your way through each book. You will find that you learn and retain more if you spend sustained time immersed in that topic rather than reading just one book.

With regard to time, my recommendation is to carve out a portion of *each day* for supplementary theological reading. This time could be early in the morning, during the day, and in your evening hours. Begin small. Start with fifteen-minute sessions three times a day, and gradually increase the amount of each session or the number of sessions, or both! By beginning with shorter sessions, you will be able to see that you are able to fit theological reading into your demanding schedule.

Write

While individual gifting, opportunities, and time will determine whether and how much we write for publication, every pastor should be a writer at some level. Why? Because writing enables you to think more carefully over a given theological topic or biblical passage while forcing you to put your thoughts in logical order. This practice subsequently enables you to communicate the truth to your people with greater clarity and coherence which, in turn, enhances their learning. If you naturally enjoy writing, you may not have much trouble following this recommendation. If you don’t consider yourself a gifted writer and you find it difficult to write, you may be tempted to ignore this counsel. Please don’t. Writing will have the immediate effect of sharpening your thinking. Sharper thinking leads to better communication and better communication leads to better shepherding.

Start today by committing to write out your sermons in longform. Even if you only take an outline to the pulpit, the practice of writing your sermons

⁵⁸I do not suggest prayer as the starting point of your knowledge acquisition as some sort of pietistic default. Rather, given the immense selection of material we presently have available, we are in desperate need of God’s guidance and wisdom to determine which books deserve our limited time and energy. Please see my article, “Pray about What Books to Read,” at FromTheStudy.com, April 19, 2016, <https://fromthestudy.com/2016/04/19/pray-about-what-books-to-read/>.

in full will help you think more thoroughly through the content and structure of your sermon. As you are forced to ponder over the theological problems and pastoral implications caused by the text and develop sound conclusions in response to those difficulties, your preaching will become clearer and easier to follow and your people will be blessed as they are able to better absorb the truth you are conveying.

But don't stop there. Cultivate the habit of personal writing as well. If you are stymied by a theological conundrum posed by a book you are currently reading, open your laptop and start writing. This practice will strengthen your mind and your ability to think systematically through theological issues rather than relying on others to do the work for you.

Get Organized and Keep Good Notes

John "Rabbi" Duncan (1796–1870) was a missionary to Jews and a professor at New College Edinburgh during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. While greatly loved by his students, he was, as his biographer described him, "a great possibility [rather] than a great realization."⁵⁹ This reference is to Duncan's inability to discipline his study and acquisition of knowledge. He possessed "an omnivorous intellectual appetite and his powers of retention were vast,"⁶⁰ and was well known for his broad learning. He loved and excelled in the Hebrew language and possessed an ardent desire to share what he was learning with others. Nevertheless, these gifts were undermined by a significant flaw: "There was a lack of any plan in his acquisition of knowledge."⁶¹ His biographer continues,

He had a fatal tendency to miscellaneous. He was often carried away intellectually with some engrossing mental problem or absorbed spiritually with some enquiry into the state of his own soul. Furthermore, he was utterly unmethodical in everything but the arrangement of his thoughts. The greatest defect of his character, however, was, as Dr. Moody Stuart points out, weakness of purpose. "You could not name any living man whom you could so easily turn aside in judgment from what he had approved, or in execution from what he had intended." This irregularity in work was fatal to his potential power as a professor and scholar.⁶²

I don't offer this observation about Duncan in order to disparage his accomplishments among his students. Duncan had a profound effect on

⁵⁹John M. Brentnall, *Just a Talker: Sayings of John ('Rabbi') Duncan* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1997), xxix.

⁶⁰Brentnall, *Just a Talker*, xxviii.

⁶¹Brentnall, *Just a Talker*, xxix.

⁶²Brentnall, *Just a Talker*, xxix.

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those who took his classes, and his students profited from his instruction both spiritually and academically.⁶³ It's also important observe that Duncan was a professor, not a pastor. Given these caveats, the cautionary principle still holds for us who labor primarily in the church as pastor-theologians: we limit our short- and long-term usefulness if we fail to impose order onto our study habits and procurement of knowledge. If we desire to maximize our usefulness and multiply our efforts, we must apply ourselves to (1) organization; and (2) note-taking and retrieval.

Pastor-theologians, regardless of our so-called personality-type, must develop a methodology for how we pursue knowledge and store that knowledge for later use. Our pursuit of knowledge cannot be driven by the newest societal or theological trend, the latest book, or most recent periodical. It's true that theological work, as we've noted above, requires acquaintance with what is currently percolating at an academic and societal level, so these current trends, new releases, and fresh publications will be of interest to us as we seek to understand the times (1 Chron 12:32). But we will dilute our well of knowledge if we are constantly dipping into every contemporary development. Prayerful, intentional planning of what topics to pursue and the consistent implementation of an effective method of how to pursue them will be essential practices in the life of the pastor. Practically, this means that we plan out our preaching and teaching schedule months in advance and start collecting resources for those teaching assignments. We sketch out a long-term plan for research and writing projects and begin to compile books and articles for that project. We establish immovable times in our weekly schedule for study, meditation, sermon preparation, reading, and writing. But we also keep good notes.

Maintaining a sound note-keeping system is vital for the pastor-theologian because it enables us to steward our study and reading time well. Ask yourself: how much time have you spent studying and reading, gleaning a wealth of insight from what you read and from your own Spirit-illuminated reflections on the material, only to lose those insights because you never troubled yourself to write them down and store them in a way that makes them easy to recover? You may have been edified and helped by what you read, but no one else will be blessed by the insights you discovered because you are now unable to retrieve them. While we can be grateful for how the Lord grants us spiritual insights through our reading and study, we should also ask ourselves if this is the best way to steward our time and resources. Maintaining an accessible, easy-to-use note-keeping and retrieval system is a simple way to strengthen this area of stewardship.

Personally, I find Evernote to be what works best for me. Other folks I know use the Notes program on their Mac. Some people use Microsoft

⁶³Brentnall, *Just a Talker*, xxxii.

OneNote, while still others use Google Keep. The point of this section is not to advocate for a particular note-keeping system—you may prefer file cabinets and file folders. Rather, my aim is to help you see the necessity of *having* a workable system, regardless of its specific structure. The notes and insights you record today may make it into your sermon next week, but they will also be available for that counseling session three weeks from now, or that article two years from now, or that class on theology you'll be asked to teach five years from now. Make the most of your time studying, reading, and meditating over Scripture and sound doctrine by getting organized and taking excellent notes.

Kill Distractions

Much is being said today about the necessity of mitigating the distractions in our lives in order to be more productive.⁶⁴ While the temptation to be diverted from our work has existed since the beginning of time, our contemporary setting—with the development of personal technology and ease-of-access to the internet—poses a unique challenge to our ability to sustain undistracted attention on our tasks. With just one click on my laptop or tap on my smartphone, I can immerse myself in something other than the work I have in front of me, whether the diversion is an article, YouTube video, pending Amazon order, ministry email, or text message. Studies are emerging that confirm something we already suspected to be true: the ease with which we can re-direct our attention away from our work to frivolous entertainment through our personal devices has actually disabled our ability to think well. We have become conditioned to expect a distraction every couple of minutes—a text alert here, a desktop notification there—so we have lost our capacity to rivet our attention on a given task for any serious amount of time.

We should recognize the problem this increasing addiction to distraction poses for pastor-theologians. The very nature of our work requires sustained thinking time, and it appears axiomatic to me that quality of insight is directly related to the time with which we are able to maintain undistracted focus on a given biblical text, theological problem, or pastoral difficulty. Given how personal technology is conditioning our minds to expect diversions every few minutes, it is not an overstatement to say that your growth as a pastor-theologian will be largely dependent upon your commitment to kill distractions during your study time and to cultivate the severe discipline of concentration.

The first step here would be to take control of your workspace—presumably, your study at home or at the church office—and corral the

⁶⁴For an excellent book on this topic, see Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Portfolio, 2019).

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personal devices most likely to introduce distractions into your day. The goal of this effort is to develop patterns of sustained concentration. For many of us, this effort to form new habits of thinking will be much like engaging in an exercise regimen. We've become mentally sluggish and flabby, so our intellects can only "run" for a few minutes at a time without needing a "breather" from YouTube or Twitter. We must start building endurance so that our minds can engage a topic, text, or troubling theological idea for multiple minutes—even hours—without stopping for a break.

The reason we need undistracted time to think is because the quality of our reflections decreases when they are punctuated by constant interruptions. Clear, deep, thorough, penetrating ideas are not formed by short bursts of mental activity. Like a fine piece of woodwork, it takes time to craft high-quality insights. Studies have shown that it takes up to twenty-three minutes for the mind to fully re-engage with the subject matter after it has been interrupted.⁶⁵ This observation is important for our concerns because it reminds us that useful insights do not emerge from the mind by fiat: they are the fruit of thoughts compounding on each other over time, where steady rumination over distinct pieces of knowledge eventually lead to an illuminating synthesis. If the process of reflection is constantly interrupted, genuine progress from particulars to synthesis is impeded and the quality of our insights is inevitably reduced. Text message notifications, email alerts, phone calls, and door knocks derail the mind and, much like a train, our minds require much time and effort to get fully back on track.

Practically, I recommend turning off all desktop and phone notifications during your study times. In order to remain available for emergencies, I set my phone to allow a few important people to reach me at any time. While I am studying, I ask the Lord to help me remain focused while I commit to not checking my inbox, browsing the internet, scanning social media, watching any videos, or engaging in any text messages. I set specific times to write and return emails, look at social media, and use the internet for non-study-related needs, and I do my best to keep to those times. As I work on exegesis, theological reading, sermon preparation, or writing, I keep to that task for the entire time I have allotted. When that time is completed, I am free to move on to other tasks.

While a pastor must be careful to not indulge his penchant for study by avoiding other shepherding responsibilities and personal relationships, he must also recognize that he cannot give adequate attention to his calling as

⁶⁵Gloria Mark, "The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress," Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, (Florence, Italy, April 5–10, 2008).

the church's theologian without much time alone with God and undistracted meditation on his text or topic. We must kill distractions.

Find a Specialty

Some suggest that pastors should pursue a PhD in their venture to grow as theologians.⁶⁶ While I wouldn't discourage a man from pursuing a PhD if he believed it would enhance his pastoral work—I sought my PhD specifically for the purpose of straddling the church and the Christian seminary for the benefit of both institutions, and I am glad I did—I do not think such a move is essential for making progress as a theologian. And for some men, the pursuit of a terminal research degree is simply not providentially possible.

Rather than viewing the PhD as a necessary asset for a budding pastor-theologian, I recommend that pastors of all educational backgrounds develop a specialty or a set of specialties over time in order to sharpen their scholarly capacities. As pastors, our primary labors will be in expositing the Scripture and taking up important theological issues for our local congregation when the need arises. As Peter Leithart notes, “the pastor theologian's most important theological publication is the sermon delivered to the local congregation.”⁶⁷ This is generalist work. The pastor must have a firm grasp on the whole of Scripture while possessing a working knowledge of every major theological loci and historic Christian doctrine. He will need an adequate understanding of biblical history, biblical backgrounds, languages, historical theology, apologetics, biblical theology, systematic theology, and counseling. Beyond this, the pastor will also need to acquaint himself with current cultural issues to protect and inform his people. In other words, the needs of his congregation will demand that he constantly broaden his knowledge across an array of topics.⁶⁸

While there is safety in generalist work—you avoid developing lop-sided, overly-narrow insights and impractical approaches to shepherding—there are also advantages to going deeper in one or two topics over your lifetime. The first advantage of developing a specialty is that it can make you useful to the

⁶⁶Hiestand and Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian*, 104–05.

⁶⁷Peter J. Leithart, “The Pastor-Theologian as Biblical Theologian: From the Church for the Church,” in *Becoming a Pastor Theologian* eds., Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2016), 19.

⁶⁸Specialties may also develop through unique, church-related issues that arise over the course of a man's pastoral ministry. The biblical counseling movement, for example, was born out of a pastor's need to provide effective counseling to his people in a context where modern psychology held preeminence, even within evangelical churches, when it came to helping people overcome their problems. See Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), xi–xxii, and David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010).

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greater church. By going deep into, say, Christology, you are developing a skill in a particular branch of Christian knowledge that enables you to genuinely engage that topic at an academic level—thus protecting your flock, feeding them rich insight into sound doctrine, and potentially making a scholarly contribution—while also distinguishing yourself as an expert in that field so that you can serve other churches and local schools with your specialty. All the while, you will bring the knowledge and experience of a pastor to bear on your area of expertise, thus serving academy by keeping the musings of professional theologians grounded in real life.

For those pastors with PhDs, your specialty will likely emerge from the focus of your dissertation. For example, I wrote my dissertation on inerrancy, so it was easy for me to keep digging in the mine I opened during my doctoral studies. To this day I continue to read and study much in the area of the doctrine of Scripture. This effort has led to teaching the subject at a seminary level and publishing on the topic at a popular and academic level.

For those pastors without PhDs, your choice of specialty will be based on other considerations. Perhaps you used your electives to focus on a particular subject during your MDiv, or you've had a long-standing interest in a specific branch of theology. Fan that interest into flame and make it a lifelong, ever-deepening pursuit of Christian knowledge. Your people and the greater church will benefit from your intensive labors, and you will derive much joy from going deep into a few topics while maintaining a broad acquaintance with other fields of biblical study.

Don't Just Do Theology

Throughout this article I've pressed the idea that pastor-theologians should be characterized by a strong work ethic and undistracted focus on his labors. I would be remiss, however, if I left you with the impression that a pastor-theologian who exalts Christ is someone who only does theology. A pastor-theologian is a well-rounded shepherd who fulfills all his responsibilities—domestic and ecclesial. Cultivating a happy, Godward home life, caring reasonably for your health, participating in life-giving recreational activities that refresh and prepare you to re-enter your labors, engaging with neighbors and the greater community, reading non-theological books, appropriating God's good gifts of food, friendship, and wholesome entertainment are all aspects of a well-rounded pastor-theologian.⁶⁹

Embrace Suffering

Finally, pastor-theologians must embrace suffering. In God's design, deep spiritual knowledge comes from meditation over Scripture coupled with affliction. We need the furnace of suffering to refine our thinking, establish

⁶⁹See also Carl Trueman, "The Importance of Not Studying Theology," in *Themelios* 35.1 (2010): 4–6.

our obedience, and sharpen our reading of Scripture. This was the Psalmist's observation: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word....It is good that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (Ps 119:67, 71). There is a learning of God's statutes that only suffering can provide. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Christianity's foundational theologian was a man acquainted with great suffering (2 Cor 11:21–12:10). Nor is it a coincidence that history's best and most insightful theologians were those who suffered most.

While it isn't pleasant to consider this aspect of the pastor-theologian's task, it is nevertheless necessary. We must be careful that we don't develop the expectation that life as a pastor-theologian will be a life tucked away in our study, hidden from the trials of life, delivering un-tested theological axioms to an eager audience each week. Yes, we must make time to be alone with God and with our books, but our study will be stunted if we are not ready to embrace suffering as the normal portion of a faithful shepherd. "Endure suffering," Paul told Timothy just before he signed off for the last time, alone in prison, soon to make his way to the gallows (2 Tim 4:5). Timothy's pastoral and theological work needed the added flavor of affliction.

VI Conclusion

The call to be a pastor is a call to be a pastor-theologian. As we've noted, this dual calling has been split in two due to various factors arising in both post-Enlightenment England and North America. The slow but sure distance that formed between shepherds and academic theologians, however, has benefitted neither the church nor the academy.

While academic specialization has produced some gains, the separation of theology from the church has gutted the pastoral office of its intellectual component so that shepherds are largely viewed as managers, motivators, and marketers rather than the church's resident theologian. As a result, sermons are shallow and books are superficial, and people die for lack of knowledge. To be a pastor-theologian who exalts Christ, therefore, we must reunite these twin roles into one office, taking our cue from the New Testament authors and the history of the pre-Enlightenment church. The labor will be immense, but the goal is achievable. Our God has equipped us with everything we need for life, godliness, and a fruitful ministry (2 Pet 1:3–11; Heb 13:20–21). By the power of the Holy Spirit and faith in the gospel, let us renew our commitment to be true pastor-theologians for the good of Christ's church.