

A CRISIS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

**"What Happens When
Sheep Hire
the Shepherd"**

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by

Dewayne Hoppert

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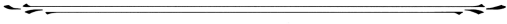


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*THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALL THE MEN
GOD HAS CALLED TO PASTOR AND LEAD
HIS NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLIES*



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A CRISIS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

"What Happens When Sheep Hire the Shepherd"

Introduction:

Without question, one of the most traumatic times in the life of a New Testament church of Jesus Christ is when the Pastor resigns and leaves. An examination of this subject will, no doubt, be both controversial and convicting. Indeed, this writer has experienced this most awkward time in his own life in the ministry. However, neither discomfort nor controversy must be allowed to prevent an honest and Biblical examination of this subject. Perhaps the biggest hurdle, and most enlightening fact, regarding this subject is that the Bible is practically silent regarding this difficult circumstance!

This study will attempt to examine this traumatic, but common occurrence from the following perspectives:

- (1) The perspective of a Pastor leaving a church.
- (2) The perspective of a church losing their Pastor.

(3) The perspective of a Pastor finding another church.

(4) The perspective of a church finding another Pastor.

This study is not intended to question the motives of churches or Pastors who struggle to cope with these awkward and difficult times. There is no value in blame except to be a catalyst for reflection and potential change. Indeed, this writer has fallen prey to some of the same practices he will examine in this study. However, serious issues will be examined and this process will question traditional practices. These practices often have been in place so long they have become institutionalized in the collective psyche of many conservative churches and their Pastors. An honest attempt will be made to understand the reasons behind the circumstances and subsequent actions of each group. This study is also intended to bring understanding and healing to both churches and Pastors who have suffered through this painful and misunderstood process. The ultimate purpose of this study, however, will be to identify BIBLICAL principles by which the members of New

Testament churches may find guidance and clarity in the, seemingly, murky process of seeking the man that God would to have lead them in accomplishing the work He has assigned to them. This process is far too important, for both Pastors and churches, NOT to seek the will of the "Great Shepherd of the Sheep" in finding the man He has prepared to lead one of His New Testament assemblies.

Failing to deal honestly with the issues raised in this study is not a viable solution either, for the landscape is literally strewn with struggling churches and men leaving the ministry. Many studies have been made of reasons men give for leaving the ministry. Interestingly, Biblical issues are rarely to be found on such lists. As disillusioned men leave the ministry and churches struggle to survive this relevance crisis, it seems as though there is one glaring deficiency; that is the absence of an absolute faith in God. There seems to be an ever increasing hesitancy by both Pastors and churches to heed great Bible truth: "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,

and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6). If men who preach about faith in God refuse to walk by faith in God when seeking their God-assigned stations for service, it should not be surprising when the churches they pastor cease to walk by faith in God as well.

The question under consideration is not the classic dilemma; "which came first, the chicken or the egg?"; rather, the question is whether or not God-called Pastors will stand and teach the, seemingly irrational, concept of walking by faith in Almighty God. Yes, teach faith to the sheep and then boldly illustrate this concept of faith in their personal lives. Then, trust their great God to bless His Word and supply their needs! This is the answer to the problems facing the churches of Jesus Christ today, and it all begins with Pastors and churches being willing to allow God to bring them together. Yes, faith is the victory that overcometh the world!

CHAPTER ONE

When a Pastor Leaves a Church

There are generally three circumstances under which a Pastor leaves a church:

- (1) The Pastor "believes" his work with the current church is over.
- (2) Conflict and turmoil convince a Pastor to leave.
- (3) The church asks the Pastor to leave ("vacating the pulpit").

First, sometimes a Pastor leaves a church when both he and the membership appear to be in good fellowship. In this circumstance the Pastor may simply believe that he has accomplished all he can at his current church and the Lord is leading him elsewhere. There are many dynamics that may contribute to such a conclusion. Occasionally, this may be the absolute sole reason for such a conclusion. A question, however, must be examined at this point. When the man first became the Pastor of this particular church both the Pastor and the church members, at least publicly, stated the conviction that it was the "will of God" for him to be Pastor of this church. Under such circum-

stances, a legitimate question would be whether God changed His mind or, perhaps, the Pastor changed his. Certainly, it might be argued that God led this man to this particular church as a "temporary assignment". This conclusion, on the surface however, seems to be problematic when one considers the immutability of God. One must wonder if God changed His mind or the Pastor changed his mind because a church and their Pastor in complete harmony is always a pleasant and powerful combination.

Upon further examination, many times, the new church to which the Pastor has been called presents more commodious circumstances. Perhaps the new church has a larger congregation, offers a larger salary, is situated in a more pleasant geographical location or offers a myriad of other advantages. Without question, there are times when a Pastor just "senses" that God is leading him to move on: however, it is unusual for a Pastor to leave a kind and loving congregation that is willing to follow his leadership. More frequently, a better opportunity is presented to the Pastor that plays a large role in his decision. Often, problems and difficulties, either real or perceived, arise that

culminate in the Pastor leaving the place that, sometime in the past, both he and the membership of the church believed God had led him. The Pastor simply does not want to cause problems so he quietly resigns and moves on.

Another circumstance that results in a Pastor leaving a church when things seem to be going well may have its genesis in the unwillingness of the Pastor to study. At first glance this would seem to be a ridiculous reason for a Pastor to leave a church. The diligent and systematic study of the Bible, however, is not an easy enterprise. This is especially true when the Pastor shapes his messages by the "topical" or "subject" method. Inevitably, when a Pastor uses this method he will face times when he simply has difficulty finding an appropriate subject. The reasons for this condition can be legion. He may simply become so physically and mentally fatigued that he has difficulty finding a new and fresh topic. Indeed, in his early ministry, this writer experienced this agonizing dilemma. W. A. Criswell addressed this great tragedy in his book "Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors". He wrote:

One reason a preacher will leave is because he does not want to study. The congregation tires of him so he goes to another field and there he just turns over the barrel and preaches his sermons until they run out, then he goes to yet another field. This is a tragedy, because the preacher ought to study and to be fresh in his message and stay in one church field all of his life (or until God sends him to another pastorate). It is a great loss for the preacher to go to another place where he loses all of the friendships and relationships that he has cultivated slowly over a long period of time. The confidence and love of a congregation which a true minister acquires constitute a tremendous element in his power. There are few ministers who widen their range of original investigation after their first pastorate. In their first pastorate, they push out into new fields and they give themselves to deeply intellectual and spiritual growth. (Criswell, p. 331).

When a Pastor leaves a church under these circumstances, it is a double tragedy for both he

and the church he leaves will suffer. The reason this is such a tragedy is because the cure is so simple and healthy for the preacher. He must ever remember that his primary calling from God is to study the blessed Word of God and deliver the message of God to His people. Indeed, both the preacher and the church will grow and be blessed if the preacher will only continue to study. Of course it is hard. There are hundreds of distractions clamoring for the attention of the Pastor; yet, he must never neglect his only real source of strength; that is constant communion with his precious Savior through diligent, prayerful study of the Word of God. When the Pastor neglects this great power, he may only continue his wonderful calling without divine direction. The prophet Isaiah stated this condition well when he said: "We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes: we stumble in noonday as in the night; *we are* in desolate places as dead *men*." (Isaiah 59:10).

A man called to pastor a flock of the children of God, above all things, must never succumb to the debilitating disease of laziness in his study of the Word of God. A poignant memory of this writer

occurred upon his visit to an older Pastor friend shortly after announcing his call to the ministry. The older man gave him some advice for the ministry when he said; "I almost worked myself to death until I discovered sermon outline books." This advice, though well intended, was not, and never will be, sound wisdom. If the Pastor is to avoid this common pitfall, he must diligently and regularly commune with his Lord to find the inexhaustible supply of the wonderful messages God would have him deliver to His people.

Second, conflict and turmoil in the church may erupt openly causing such discomfort for the Pastor (and very frequently, his family); he concludes that if he were to stay with the church, a deep division among the membership would occur. Under these circumstances the Pastor may feel that he has no choice but to resign. It must be noted that such conflict and turmoil are rarely biblical in nature! In such a case the Pastor may truly believe that he has no choice but to resign. A valid and important question, however, might be for the Pastor to inquire from God whether or not it was really His will for him to leave His flock.

The reason for conflict and turmoil in most churches will most frequently be found in either personality conflicts or bruised egos. These problems may have their root with a member, or members, of the church or with the Pastor himself. Regardless of the apparent source of the problems, the real source is satanic in nature. Obviously, the most powerful force on this earth in carrying out Kingdom of God responsibilities is a New Testament Church of Jesus Christ! It is just as obvious that Satan will do everything within his considerable power to disrupt the fellowship and hinder the work of such a church. Since this is a fact, both the Pastor and the membership of the church would do well to determine whether personality conflicts or bruised egos are sufficient reason to trump the work and will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, there are specific Bible instructions sufficient to resolve hurt feelings and other non-biblical problems that may arise within the membership of a church of Jesus Christ. In such cases the biblical remedy is found in repentance and forgiveness, or church discipline, not in the Pastor abandoning the church. There is no honor for a

Pastor to leave a church under such circumstances.

The writer is aware that this statement will be seen, by some, as a stinging indictment, however, this is not the intent at all. Almost all Pastors have experienced this type of ungodly behavior within churches before, often over and over again within the same church. The reader is asked to ponder whether or not such difficulties are ever resolved by the Pastor leaving?

Conflict and turmoil are always found where repentance and forgiveness are absent. The Pastor, however, must determine whether he is going to be a "shepherd" or a "hireling" as defined by Jesus in John chapter ten. For the Pastor to leave under such circumstances, both the Pastor and the church will suffer. The Pastor will suffer because he has not lovingly applied biblical remedies to help the church resolve ungodly attitudes or behavior. Indeed, he will have abandoned the sheep when the wolf appeared. Such ungodly action will never please his Lord. One may counter that the problems existed before he came and are beyond his ability to cope; however, that excuse will not stand the scrutiny of Bible truth. The

church will suffer because the real cause of the problems, having not been dealt with, will still exist and must be faced by the next Pastor. Some churches have been rendered powerless for years because of the failure of Pastors to expose and deal with long-standing problems. Such problems continue to cripple such churches for years.

Third, there are times when a church takes matters into its own hand when a Pastor will not leave during times of stress in the church. Again such stress and conflict may result from arrogance, bitterness or error on the part of the Pastor. Once again, the Bible provides the solution for almost all of these cases. In the case of arrogance or bitterness on the part of the Pastor, the instructions of Jesus regarding personal offences must be applied. These instructions given by the Lord Himself as the remedy for any sort of personal offence (caused by the Pastor or members) within the local assembly is found in Matthew 18:15-17 which state:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

This is perhaps the most neglected teaching regarding the health and unity of a New Testament church found in the Bible. Far too often when one member offends another church member, the offended party will tell everyone except the brother who offended him. In the case of a member offended by the Pastor, this same remedy is applicable. The truth is, however, the offended member will rarely go to the Pastor alone and give him the opportunity to make things right. When the biblical remedy is ignored, stress and tension will surely always follow. This disobedient action by the offended party is sin and will only grow worse until it grows, as a cancer, into a crisis within the membership. If biblical instruction are ignored long enough the crisis will escalate into

openly hostile behavior. Many times the original offence was simply a misunderstanding that might easily have been resolved by simple obedience to the Word of God. Soon the membership begins to choose sides and the church becomes divided.

When the church becomes divided because of a personal offence, the atmosphere of the church will be marked by turmoil and conflict as noted above. If the Pastor chooses to stay without lovingly leading the church to deal with the conflict, both he and the membership will soon become embittered. Often the Pastor has not been called by another church and feels trapped financially. Not unlike a cornered animal, he strikes out in anger and may cause further escalation of the crisis. Without the application of the biblical remedy, the crisis may escalate out of control to the point that the membership sees no solution to the problem but to "vacate the pulpit". This is the common term used to describe the action of firing the Pastor. Most church members are not comfortable using such terms as "firing the Pastor" because, even subconsciously, they sense the idea that they

have entered into an area that belongs to God alone.

Normally, under these conditions the membership would much prefer for the Pastor to voluntarily resign. Therefore, unwilling to attempt to resolve the offence in a biblical manner, the membership attempts to increase the discomfort for the Pastor and his family. Some of the newer members of the church, sensing that something is wrong, begin to drift away. As a result finances begin to suffer. Sometimes even the older members begin to reduce their financial support in an attempt to force the Pastor to resign because there are not sufficient monies available to pay his salary. These actions create a truly poisonous and ungodly climate among the membership. It must ever be remembered that the biblical solution always has the goal of "gaining thy brother".

A church in such a condition will have been rendered totally ineffective by such sinful behavior. Satan surely must be delighted by such impotence of a church of Jesus Christ. The very people who would claim to represent the Lord actually hinder the work of the Kingdom of God. As the crisis escalates to the point that "something must

be done", as a last resort, a meeting of the church membership is called to solve the problem. People, whose names remain on the church roll, even though they have not attended for years, are urged to come to this meeting "to save the church". Finally, a motion is made to vacate the pulpit (fire the Pastor). At this point, the will of God is not the subject under consideration. The church will have deteriorated to little more than a mob and the lynching is soon accomplished.

When a church reaches this point, there are no winners. The Pastor, either innocent or guilty, will never be the same again. His reputation has been stained, his name sullied, and his family traumatized. Now, he has no choice but to leave. The church also has suffered severe damage to the point that some will never recover; all because either, or both the church and Pastor have refused to follow the Word of God!

Should a Pastor begin to teach matters that are contrary to the clear teachings of the Word of God, the Bible has a solution for this problem as well. Erroneous teaching will ultimately cause division within the membership of the church. Interestingly, the word "heresy" means "division"

and that is exactly what follows. The apostle Paul instructed Titus in Titus 3:10-11 "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject: Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." Obviously, a member of the church who has been offended by this sort of erroneous teaching should lovingly admonish the Pastor regarding his teaching. If this first admonishment by the offended member is ignored, then he should take one or two more so that no misunderstanding may occur. After the second admonition, the Pastor should be rejected. Obviously, a Pastor who continues to teach error that causes division after loving correction cannot be allowed to teach in the church.

An overarching principle that is consistent in the Bible is the attempt to restore fellowship among the membership of the church. The Christian couple Aquila and Priscilla demonstrated a marvelous example of correct behavior as they admonished Apollos regarding his incomplete teaching of the church in Ephesus. This event is recorded in Acts 18:26 which states: "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him

unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly". What a marvelous and correct act of Christian love was exhibited by this fine couple.

In conclusion, Pastors should not accept the pastorate of a church without being confident their assignment is the will of God. Once on the field, they should diligently and lovingly use all of their ability to teach the membership the "whole counsel of God". Finally, they should not leave until they are absolutely convinced such action is the will of God. Any other reason for leaving will diminish their usefulness!

CHAPTER TWO

When a Church Loses Her Pastor

When a church loses her Pastor, whether the members realize it or not, the church is in an extremely vulnerable position. The danger is as great as that which would occur if a shepherd suddenly abandoned a flock of sheep. Obviously, this is not a natural condition and will leave the sheep extremely vulnerable to predators who will feed on the flock, or, to the inability of the sheep to find adequate food and water. A church without a Pastor is in a similarly vulnerable position. It should be clear when such a condition exists, something has gone terribly wrong.

This subject will be examined from the same three perspectives discussed in the previous chapter as circumstances under which a Pastor leaves a church:

- (1) The Pastor believes his work with the current church is over.
- (2) Conflict and turmoil convince a Pastor to leave.

(3) The church asks the Pastor to leave ("vacating the pulpit").

First, when a Pastor suddenly leaves a church at a time when things appear to be going well in the church, most of the members will feel a sense of abandonment. This uncomfortable circumstance will, no doubt, leave many of the members with the forlorn sense of being abandoned by their Pastor in favor of a "better" church. This is a totally inappropriate response since no true church of Jesus Christ is inherently better or more valuable than another. Yet, doubts of inadequacy in such areas as the number of the members, financial resources or the quality of the facilities often leave the membership questioning their worth as a church. This type of response is due to the unbiblical notion that has crept into the collective psyche of modern Christianity that bigger is better and that more money, or more modern facilities is a sure sign of the blessings and approval of God. This sinister type of thinking has led many churches to focus more on accumulating these "signs" of the blessings of God than on remaining true and faithful to His holy Word.

When a church of Jesus Christ succumbs to this sort of thinking because their Pastor leaves at a time when things appear to be going well, the response of the members will generally fall into two categories. First, some of the members, though saddened, are apt to conclude that the Lord simply "promoted" their Pastor to a better (larger, richer etc) church so that his talents and ability might not be wasted on a less important church. Those members who reach this conclusion, though saddened, will congratulate their Pastor on his "promotion" and resign themselves to looking for another "trainee" type of Pastor. This type of flawed, worldly thinking has infected many of the churches of Jesus Christ. This thinking is totally unbiblical and harmful to those who embrace it. There simply are no "stepping stone", or "training wheel", or "unimportant" New Testament churches of Jesus Christ! Indeed, some churches with small congregations require a Pastor of vast experience and patience in order to lead the members! A brief example should forever settle the fallacy of such thinking. The night before Jesus was crucified, He instituted the marvelous

memorial ordinance of the Lord's Supper with the members of the church He established during His personal ministry. It should be noted on that special occasion His New Testament Assembly consisted of Jesus and eleven members. This church owned no property and had very little of the resources of this world. In light of the flawed thinking of some today, this Assembly of Jesus Christ would be insignificant!

The second type of response by the members of a church, whose Pastor leaves when things seemed to be going well, though motivated by hurt, will manifest itself by anger toward their former Pastor. Some members, responding out of hurt and anger, may even say some very hurtful things about the Pastor. They may focus on some of the imperfections in character or weakness in his abilities. This type of response will almost be harmful to the Pastor as well as to members of the church itself. Obviously, this second type of response might well be attributed to a self-defense mechanism put forward as a shield to avoid any self-examination by the members themselves. Ob-

viously, either of these two responses will be damaging to both the Pastor and the church.

It seems as though many church members have been conditioned to believe it is simply not appropriate to question their Pastor as to the reason why he believes his work is through at their church. They feel the Pastor is above this sort of inquiry as to his motivation for leaving. This incorrect thinking is based upon the assumption that Pastors have an unseen "pipeline" to God through which the Lord gives clear and unmistakable orders. If this premise was correct, why do so many Pastors agonize over decisions regarding the "will of God"? The plain truth is that Pastors struggle as much to identify the "will of God" as the members of the churches they pastor. This writer discovered this truth while attending his first year of seminary. A church approximately two hundred miles from the school extended a call for him to be their Pastor. After a few days of agonizing thought and prayer, he told that church that he did not believe that it was the "will of God" for him to accept their offer because it would interfere with his seminary education. Fearing he

might have made a mistake, he asked his father, also a Pastor, how a man could KNOW he had made the correct decision. The answer of his father was very instructive, but not very comforting, as his father responded: "After you have been there about five years!"

Since an infallible "pipeline" to God does not exist for a Pastor, perhaps another way to evaluate the accuracy of his decision should be sought. Perhaps a more reliable indicator would be to evaluate the completeness of his obedience to the command of God to "TEACH MY WORD!" Obviously, since he has not exhausted all of the teachings of the Bible at his current location it would seem that such inquiry should be totally appropriate. Certainly, the existence of conflict and turmoil in the church he pastors is no reliable indicator that the work of the Pastor is over. This flawed response is as inappropriate as a physician deciding to move to a different location because there were too many sick people in the city where his practice was located! The words of Jesus would seem to be very appropriate just here. Having been accused of eating and drinking with the un-

savory Publicans and sinners, Jesus responded in Mark 2:17: "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If members of churches knew and practiced completely the Word of God, they would not need a Pastor! Indeed, the existence of ignorance, conflict and turmoil is indicative of much need of the Pastor.

In many churches there are some members who seem to think it is a healthy thing for the Pastor to leave after two or three years. This flawed thinking is probably the result of historical patterns. These members seem to believe that it is healthy for the church to change Pastors occasionally just for the church to get a "fresh start". It is, however, impossible for churches and Pastors to grow spiritually when such short tenures are the norm. A Pastor can hardly become well acquainted with all of the members in two or three years (not an uncommon length of time for pastoral change). This sort of pattern will always be harmful for the Pastor and the church.

Second, when the Pastor leaves the church in the midst of conflict and turmoil, there is almost always a division within the membership. As mentioned in the last chapter of this study, some divisions in churches may be deep seeded within the membership. Sometimes the division existed before the Pastor arrived. In such cases the lack of repentance and forgiveness may have plagued the church for years, or even for generations. If the underlying problems that caused these divisions are not dealt with in a biblical manner, the church will continue in a perpetual state of turmoil. In such cases, the church will call a new Pastor and, following a short time of surface cooperation, the divisions will soon appear once again and will only intensify until the Pastor leaves and the process begins again.

It is not at all uncommon in some churches that most of the members are completely aware of the source of these divisions. In some churches the divisions can be traced back to long-held grudges between families or individuals within the church. These grudges may even span generations and are handed down from parents to children like poi-

sonous heirlooms. In such cases the real divisions often remain publicly undisclosed, just below the surface, while their presence inevitably poisons the fellowship of the church. Such divisions, often unknown to the Pastor, ultimately manifest themselves in bitter controversy over seemingly trivial issues. As the Pastor struggles to resolve these, seemingly, petty problems he will become discouraged and frustrated.

Generally Pastors move more often than established members in a church; therefore, when the inevitable turmoil begins to surface it seems easier for the Pastor to resign rather than to stay and attempt to resolve the problems. Obviously, if the Pastor stays in such a church long enough the real divisions will become apparent. When the true nature of the problems is exposed, a responsible Pastor will attempt to deal with them in a biblical manner. Yet, too often the Pastor is viewed as expendable. In simple terms, it is often more palatable for the members to create circumstances which result in the Pastor leaving than it is to confront the real problems, so, the Pastor leaves.

The real tragedy is that the problems remain unresolved and the church remains crippled.

If the Pastor, himself, is the source of the conflict and turmoil and chooses to remain without repentance, the members may become divided based on their friendship with the Pastor. Under this circumstance the level of conflict will grow, members will begin to leave and the church will grow weaker. Tragically, the less mature members become the early casualties. As the church continues to weaken, a pervasive pessimism erodes the joy that should be present in a church of Jesus Christ. In such a case any hope of the church being a positive testimony of the blessings of God will soon disappear. The church will grow weaker and weaker until finally failing finances result in the church becoming unable to support the Pastor. During this tragic process the members may become divided into two camps, one that likes the Pastor, and one that dislikes him and wants him to leave. Eventually, either out of frustration or anger, the Pastor will often resign. In the wake of his leaving the Pastor leaves the members of the church broken and divided.

When a Pastor leaves under the circumstances of conflict and turmoil, the church will have suffered a terrible blow. Either the membership will be divided over the personality of the Pastor, or over the old pre-existing divisions.

Third, when circumstances between the Pastor and the church deteriorate to the point the Pastor is forced to leave, the church will have suffered an almost fatal blow. Most church members are uncomfortable with the prospect of vacating the pulpit or "firing the Pastor". The discomfort often becomes so severe that many members would rather leave the church than become involved in such an enterprise. In the thinking of those who leave, there will exist a fear that they do not want to be a part an action that might anger the Lord. This is not an unreasonable conclusion, especially if the members are not thoroughly familiar with the teachings of the Bible. Indeed, there are no biblical reasons for vacating the pulpit except for the same reasons under which church discipline would be necessary for any member of the church.

There are some members who are not so timid when they do not like the Pastor. The thinking of

such members is often based on the misunderstanding that a Pastor is just an "employee" of the church and serves at the pleasure of the church. Such flawed thinking is not found in the Bible. A true Pastor is called by God, Himself, to be the under-shepherd of a church of Jesus Christ. Even the process of calling of a Pastor is unlike anything in the business world. Indeed, the terminology used to describe the process of finding a Pastor used in churches ascribes, at least nominally, a divine component to the enterprise. The term "seeking the will of God" is a common phrase used by almost all churches when attempting to find a new Pastor. When the church decides on the man to be their new Pastor, they "call" him to be their Pastor; they do not "hire" their Pastor. This concept of involving the will of God in the process of calling a Pastor will be discussed more fully later in this study; however, most church members sense the presence of a divine element in this process. This concept, even if not understood well, is sufficient to make many members reluctant to fire the Pastor.

Other members, however, see no difference between firing a Pastor and firing any other employee. Such ignorance of the teachings of the Word of God is truly sad, and perhaps even dangerous. Such ignorance of the Word of God coupled with the emotions of anger and frustration will often result in a church harshly firing their Pastor. Under such circumstances, the action will almost always be done without any sign of the Christian attributes of love or compassion. Such ungodly action by a church is clearly contrary to the will of God and will render the members of such a church out of fellowship with their Lord.

Obviously, there are times when a Pastor conducts himself in such a manner as to render him unfit to continue as Pastor of the church. As mentioned earlier, however, the process to be followed by the church is the same process the members must follow in exercising church discipline. The overriding principle in church discipline is the restoration of the erring brother. The apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, stated this principle in Galatians 6:1 which states: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault,

ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." There is nothing in the Bible that suggests a different type of treatment just because the man "...overtaken in a fault..." happens to be the Pastor. It must be emphasized here that the ones doing the restoring are to be "...ye which are spiritual...". This action requires love and compassion, not anger and frustration.

If, under such circumstances, the Pastor refuses the restorative efforts of spiritually minded, compassionate members of the church, then, the actions required by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17, as stated in chapter one of this study must be followed. In such a case, tears of compassion and heartbreak ought to be flowing from the members of the church. Under no condition is a church of Jesus Christ instructed to act out of anger and harshness.

This section must not be ended without noting how Jesus instructed the church He established to treat such an unrepentant brother. The last portion of verse 17 states: "...let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." These words have

been misused in many cases when a church is forced to declare that a brother is out of fellowship with the church. The treatment demanded by Jesus is not to be hostile and harsh; rather, one need simply see how Jesus treated these kinds of individuals during His ministry on earth. He always treated these people with love and compassion, not with anger or hostility. There is absolutely no biblical justification for hostile or harsh treatment by His children of anyone at any time.

In conclusion, when a church of Jesus Christ loses her Pastor it is always a tragedy. In the case of a Pastor who dies during his pastorate, there will be the natural grieving over the death of a spiritual leader and a great friend. In every other case, a Pastor that leaves a church is indicative of a failure! This failure may be the fault of the Pastor or the church; yet, make no mistake, it is the result of a failure. The writer is aware of the fact that this statement will seem harsh; yet, just as a Pastor should never accept the assignment to be the Pastor of a church without the intention to be there for life, neither should a church call a man

as Pastor without the intention that he serve for
life!

CHAPTER THREE

A Pastor Finding Another Church

When a Pastor finds himself without a church, whether he left his last church voluntarily, or if he was "fired", he will generally be very nervous. The apprehension that accompanies a Pastor finding another church will always be traumatic for both he and his family. This process is not that dissimilar from an employee finding a new job, or a recently divorced man contemplating finding a new wife. This statement is not, in any way, an attempt to disrespect the dignity of the office of a Pastor; rather, it is intended to reflect an honest examination of a truly stressful time in the life of a man of God.

This condition will be examined from the same three perspectives as the first two chapters of this study:

- (1) The Pastor believes his work with the current church is over.
- (2) Conflict and turmoil convince a Pastor to leave.

(3) The church asks the Pastor to leave ("vacating the pulpit").

First, when a Pastor leaves a church when things appear to be going well and good fellowship seems to exist between the Pastor and the church members, the Pastor will be in control of the change. As mentioned in chapter one of this study, there are times when the Pastor truly feels that he has done all that he can accomplish at his church. When one digs a little deeper and asks appropriate questions, however, that reason simply appears dubious. Remembering that before he agreed to accept the role as Pastor of his former church he said, at least publicly, that he believed it was the will of God for him to be Pastor of that church. A Pastor putting forth this reason for leaving surely knows that he has not fully taught every aspect of the Word of God. Further, there is no doubt that not all of the membership has made a serious commitment to make Jesus Christ the king of their lives.

When these two basic questions are honestly examined, the Pastor knows that his work was not done! More than likely one of several conditions

existed that prompted his decision. First, he may have detected some unseen problem existing just under the surface that he felt had the potential to disrupt the unity of the church. Second, he may have become discouraged because finances or church growth have not met his expectations. Third, he may have exhausted his supply of sermons and feels it would be easier to leave than to do the work necessary to develop more. Fourth, he may have family problems that he feels could be resolved by moving to a new location. The list of possible reasons that would result in a Pastor leaving a church when circumstances appear to be going well could hardly be exhausted.

One reason, however, that must not be overlooked is that he may have been contacted by another church and offered a pastorate he might deem to be more desirable. He may even believe that this new opportunity will solve any problem, either real or perceived, at his old church. Perhaps, he might well reason, a new church in a different town might be just what he needs to rejuvenate his ministry. The new church will most always offer a larger salary or other desirable bene-

fits. The writer recalls an actual story of a fellow Pastor who was contacted by a larger church and asked to come and preach "in view of a call". The Pastor told the caller that he really was not very interested since he had only recently moved to his current church. However, he said he thought he would go see "what the new church had to offer". After preaching the Sunday morning sermon, he was asked to meet with the men of the church in the afternoon. During this meeting he reported that he was asked this totally inappropriate question: "Well preacher what will it take to get you?" The Pastor related the following response: "I really wasn't very interested, so I named a figure that was twice my current salary." He went home that evening confident that he would not hear from that church again. To his surprise, a representative from the new church called the next Wednesday night and told him that the church would meet his request! The surprised Pastor then told the writer: "I figured that it must be the Lord's will if they were willing to pay that much, so I accepted." The writer must admit the fact that he heard only one side of this account, how-

ever, the man who related the story suddenly resigned the church where had been the Pastor for less than six months and accepted the position of the other church.

Clearly, this was an unusual story and in no way would reflect the way most God-called Pastors would respond. Most of the Pastors known by the writer would never engage in this sort of ungodly behavior. When a church extends a call for a man currently the Pastor of another church to preach "in view of a call", however, the members generally put their best foot forward. This kind of behavior is never a biblical example of finding a new Pastor. Obviously, in this example the will of God becomes an early casualty in the process. Most Pastors truly seek the will of God in their lives; yet, they are only frail humans and, thus, must be constantly aware of the tactics of Satan.

Once again, it must be stated that most godly Pastors would never consciously engage in such behavior. However, it is not uncommon for a Pastor to have already accepted the call of another church when he leaves a church where no apparent problem exists.

Second, when a Pastor resigns a church in the midst of conflict and turmoil, he will frequently not have accepted the call to be Pastor of another church. Occasionally, such a Pastor will be allowed to stay in the house provided by the church until he finds another church to pastor. For a short time he may become despondent over his perceived failure; however, soon the reality of finding a new church to pastor will move him to action. Surely, he will be praying for the Lord to open a new door of opportunity. After all, he will normally have a family to support and bills that must be paid. So, he begins to make discreet inquiries of his fellow Pastors or acquaintances regarding churches that may be in need of a new Pastor. If a new opportunity does not appear soon, feelings of panic may begin to rise in his mind.

When, after a few weeks, if he has not found a new church to pastor, he will begin to sense pressure from his old church to leave his church-provided housing. After all, he will be told that his old church is actively seeking another Pastor and the house will be needed for the new Pastor and his family. Obviously, the worst thing such a man

can do is take the first opportunity without being convinced it is the will of God. Surely, under such circumstances, the Pastor must spend some time in prayer and reflection as he seeks the will of God for himself and his family. The very real pressure of time and financial responsibilities soon may force the Pastor to urgently seek a new church to pastor.

An eerily similar story is found in the book of Judges, chapters 17 and 18. In these chapters is the account of a time of great apostasy in the history of the nation of Israel. The priesthood had become corrupt and the people had abandoned their God-assigned duty of giving a tenth of their income to support the priestly tribe of Levi. Obviously, when the people stopped giving, the members of the tribe of Levi began to fear what, they perceived, would be a total loss of income and support. In this condition of imminent perceived danger, this passage of Scripture tells the story of a young Levite from the town Beth-lehem-judah. Obviously fearing the danger of not receiving support as God had designed, this young man left his home and headed north for the specific reason

"...to sojourn where he could find a *place*...". This story indicates no direction from God for this young man to leave his home and look for a job and a place to stay. This was simply a case of a young man reaching the end of his patience and deciding, " he must do something". There is no indication that the young Levite actually suffered the loss of life sustaining provisions at home; rather, it seemed reasonable for him to assume that he soon would experience such loss. So he left the place of his assignment because of circumstances. There can be no doubt the circumstances did, indeed, appear grim for this young man. As he journeyed north, he soon encountered a man named Micah who had become involved in idolatrous worship. His actions are recorded in Judges 17:5, which states: "And the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest." Soon, "as fate would have it" the young Levite encountered Micah. It seemed like a match made in heaven; Micah needed a "real" priest, and the Levite needed a job. The sad account of this

encounter is recorded in Judges 17:9-13 which state:

And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I *am* a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a *place*.

And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten *shekels* of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

Then said Micah, Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to *my* priest.

Obviously, this story has a sad ending as soon the tribe of Dan, in a coerced move of "upward mobility", took the young Levite from Micah and made him priest of an entire tribe in Israel! This

entire sad story began because a young man, from a tribe in Israel that had been consecrated by God to do His work, became frightened when facing imminent financial ruin. The story of the young Levite moving because of self-preservation is an appropriate example of a Pastor, having been forced to resign his church because of conflict and turmoil. Then, finding himself in circumstances where he sees no option but to frantically search for a church, any church!

An appropriate question to be asked regarding this story of the young Levite would be; would not God protect and provide for his necessities if he simply, by faith, stayed where he was and trusted God? The obvious answer is absolutely, yes, God can and will take care of His people if they will but trust him. Would not then God take care of the needs of a man He had called into His ministry? Again, an affirmative answer is obvious. The only question is; can a God-called Pastor trust God to care for him when circumstances appear grim? That is the answer! The man of God must live by faith; move by faith and trust God to supply the needs of him and his family. Such a Pastor

leaving a church because of conflict and turmoil should ask God to forgive him for leaving his assigned post and failing to properly lead His, sometimes rebellious, sheep. Then he should patiently wait for the certain protection and leadership of his Good Shepherd!

The writer is aware that faith is perhaps one of the most preached, but least practiced subjects in the Bible. Indeed, he has been told by others facing difficult circumstances that, "if God does not open a door, then we must do it ourselves." That is not sound biblical advice! During the last days of 1999, when many people, even Christians, were near panic because of fear of some kind of disastrous "millennium bug" affecting the economy of the country, faith was not a popular subject. Thousands of people, including Christians, were stocking their shelves and pantries in case of a disastrous shortage of food. The writer was privileged to speak at another church during a special service. He chose, as his subject, the need to trust the Lord and walk by faith. He particularly noted the panic many were exhibiting around the world in the face of the approach of the year 2000. Fol-

lowing the message, during a time of fellowship, an older member of the church angrily told him that trusting God to care for him when he could do something for himself was a stupid and dangerous concept! The writer still wonders what this man did with his large number of hundred pound sacks of rice and beans he had stored away.

Faith; faith in the omnipotent and omniscient God is the only appropriate counter to debilitating fear. To fail to understand this concept is to repeat the story of the young Levite over and over again. One must come to the conclusion that God can and will take care of His people, especially those who have committed their lives to His service. B. H. Carroll, in his classic commentary "An Interpretation of the English Bible" spoke eloquently on the necessity of faith on the part of the Pastor. Though writing about the small faith of bi-vocational Pastors, he wrote:

When Christ sent out his apostles he commanded them to take no means of support, saying, "The laborer is worthy of his meat and his hire." In other words, "I would be a very poor employer if I sent you

out to confine your attention strictly to my work, and make you hustle to get your living from other things." Wherever there is no adequate provision for ministerial support, and the preacher must do things for his living, run a farm or practice medicine, we may rest assured that he cannot give his undivided attention to the ministry, and that churches that receive that kind of ministry do not receive the full work of the ministry. The calamity in that case is on the church. Oftentimes it is downright covetousness that is the cause of it. Churches think we can get Brother So-and-so for fifty dollars a year, and we can just have preaching once a month. Can a church prosper on once a month's preaching?

I have always taken this position: If any preacher, truly called of God to preach, will implicitly trust, not the churches, but the Lord Jesus Christ to take care of him, and will consecrate his entire time to the work of the ministry, verily he shall be clothed

and fed, or else the heavens will fall, and God's word will not be so.

I made that statement once and some of the brethren questioned it. I still stand on it.

If I were a young man again, I would do just as I did then, burn all the bridges behind and push out on the promises of God, that perhaps not in my way, not in the church's way, but in some way the Lord Jesus Christ would take care of my wife and children.

I would say in my heart, "I am God's man; I am to go out as his minister, to do his work, to do no other business; and sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, I will trust the Lord and stick to my work." I have tried trusting Jesus and he has never failed; I have had men to lie to me straight-out; I have had 1,000 promises to fail, coming from men, but never has any promise of God failed that he has ever made. (Carroll, 1913 Vol. XIII p. 163-164).

Obviously, the advice of Brother Carroll is no more popular today than it was when he gave it originally. Faith, in the face of imminent disaster is often seen as stupidity. Again, one must remember the words of Hebrew 11:6 which states: "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The Pastor looking for a new church should always remember the truth of these words. Sadly, however, such is not the norm when a Pastor is facing apparent financial disaster. The common response to the call from a church, any church, will normally be seen as the answer from God to the panicked prayers of the Pastor and his family. The question as to whether this call from a church is the will of God for the Pastor is generally not even considered in such a time. This call, in the nick of time, will almost always be seen as proof that "God answers prayers". This is probably not a response unlike that of the young Levite. In such a circumstance, the Pastor is not in control, perhaps the Lord is not in control; rather, circumstance and fear may have taken control. It must

be remembered that Satan frequently works in the realm of fear and circumstance.

These statements are not made to cheapen, or say that such a call may not be the will of God; rather, they are made to show that such a Pastor must be on guard against the tactics of Satan. Obviously, the stress a Pastor faces in such a difficult time is not to be minimized as it is very real and painful; however, God does have a perfect will for the man He has called into His ministry. It has been the observation of this writer that such a call frequently simply provides only a brief respite for the Pastor to give him time to reflect and seek a more permanent place to pastor. Criswell wrote regarding times when a Pastor faces difficulties and is tempted to move on:

Sometimes the Pastor wants to leave because of multiplying, unsolvable difficulties in the church. He ought to remember, however, that there are no churches without their difficulties. The Pastor ought to resist the expectation that another field will be easier and more salubrious than the one in which he now labors. Under no condition

should the preacher leave unless there is a great, compelling reason for his going. Hardships, difficulties, and trials are not among those reasons. (Criswell, 1980, p. 332).

Third, when a Pastor is actually "fired" (by a church vacating the pulpit) from his pastorate, he will be traumatized and hurt. His reputation will be damaged and his self-image will suffer enormous harm. It is not uncommon for such a Pastor to leave the ministry following such action, and there are some churches that have put many men out of the ministry by such godless actions. Generally, such churches develop a well-earned reputation as a church that Pastors should avoid. It is not uncommon for such churches to become a "stopping place" for Pastors who have been forced to resign their churches due to conflict and turmoil. Inevitably, however, such churches are hardly a safe haven for the hurting Pastor.

After a Pastor has been "fired", if he does not leave the ministry, he will frequently become bitter for the rest of his time in the ministry. The writer recalls an occasion that occurred while he

was attending seminary. He was invited to attend a "Monday morning coffee meeting" of local area Pastors. This meeting, as one might imagine, was not an inspiring and uplifting experience. A couple of the participants were buoyed by the results of the events of the previous Sunday services; however, the majority of the men were not in a happy mood. As one after another recounted his, less than optimistic, circumstances it became obvious that these meetings were frequently little more than gripe sessions. After about an hour, a particularly angry Pastor entered and began to disparage the church where he was Pastor. He concluded his tirade with this sad statement: "If I get a call from a church offering me five dollars a week more than that I make now, I will be gone!" Needless to say, this was the last "Monday morning coffee" the writer ever attended.

This kind of bitter animosity should never become the attitude of a Pastor, even on Monday mornings! The truth is that there are many Pastors who, having experienced less than charitable treatment from, perhaps more than one church, develop such attitudes. To such the ministry be-

comes a nightmarish job where confrontation and antagonism becomes the norm.

A Pastor who has been "fired" by his church, or forced to resign as a result of conflict and turmoil, needs some time to heal and commune with his Lord. Rather than becoming bitter in the ministry, he should take some time off to commune with his Lord, pray with his family and reassess his calling. Unfortunately, most Pastors have neither the finances nor the support system to allow such time of rest and honest re-evaluation. Just here is a place where a church with a vision to provide such needed help could be of invaluable service to the Lord and His men. Such a church could provide temporary housing and salary for the purpose of allowing a hurting Pastor to rest, regroup and commune with his Lord. In the opinion of this writer, such a church would be a blessing beyond words and, indeed, would be greatly blessed by the Lord for providing such compassionate service. Unfortunately, the writer is not aware of any church willing to provide such invaluable need. Many churches would consider such expenditure of funds as totally wasteful.

Sadly, most of the time, such a Pastor will either, quickly find another church to pastor, or get a secular job and, perhaps, leave the ministry.

In conclusion, a Pastor trying to find another church is truly working "out of category." This is not an appropriate job for the Pastor; it is a job that belongs to God, and God alone. Rather; he should confess his anger to his Lord, then he should prayerfully wait, study the Word of God, worship together with his family in another New Testament church and "wait" for that pleasant place of his divine assignment. W. A. Criswell wrote true words when he said:

Let no pastor persuade himself that he will escape these days and times of trial. Kings and presidents and prime ministers and corporate executives and great men and mighty men confront awesome troubles just the same as prophets and apostles and missionaries and preachers. No one is exempt, not even Moses or Elijah or Peter or Paul. Least of all, therefore, should the pastor think to escape problems and trials, es-

pecially since he lives so close to the people. (Criswell, 1980, p. 329).

CHAPTER FOUR

A Church Trying to Find Another Pastor

As mentioned in Chapter Two of this study, a church of Jesus Christ without a Pastor is in an extremely vulnerable position. Sensing the danger of such a condition, after the immediate shock diminishes, the church will almost always begin the process of searching for a new Pastor. At the beginning of this process one glaring and sobering truth will appear; that is, there are absolutely no instructions in the Bible for such an enterprise! Certainly, someone will make some statement regarding the need to seek the will of God as the process begins; yet, without specific biblical instructions, the members embark blindly on this process. Lacking such specific directions from the Word of God, the members are likely to adopt some traditional, but flawed, methods. Two examples of flawed methods churches use to find replacement Pastors today will be examined, they are:

Appointing Pastors Based on Apostolic Authority

There are two examples in the Bible where the apostle Paul, using his authority as an apostle, appointed the leaders of new churches. First, he left instructions for Titus to appoint certain men to be "elders" in Crete. Second, he simply left men in charge of "teaching" members of a new church. In the first case, Paul instructed Titus to appoint "Elders" to serve the churches on the island of Crete. This account is recorded in Titus chapter 1, verse 5 which states: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:" The phrase, "as I had appointed thee" is a translation of the Greek phrase "wj egw, soi dietaxamhn". A literal translation of these Greek words is "which I myself appointed to you". The Greek word "dietaxamhn" is an indicative aorist middle form of the word "diatassw". Joseph Thayer, in his excellent lexicon, "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament", gives the following meaning to this word: "to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, give order:" (p. 142).

While granting the fact that Paul had the apostolic authority to direct such appointing of Elders in the churches of Crete, most conservative churches today would rebel at the notion of any man having the authority of appointing Pastors of the churches of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the Roman Catholic Church believes that apostolic authority continues today and uses this assumed authority of the Pope to appoint priests for their congregations. Many protestant denominations also follow that same flawed pattern. However, the only apostolic authority that exists today is found in the divinely inspired writings of the apostles in the Bible.

The second example of using apostolic authority to select a new Pastor is based on the other accounts of times when Paul left men in charge of teaching new converts in cities he was leaving. Using this method today, however, must be rejected on the same ground as the previous method. Apostolic authority died with the apostles!

These two examples of replacing a Pastor based on "apostolic authority" today are totally

without support in the Word of God. Therefore, there are relatively few cases of Bible believing churches using either of these two examples of flawed reasoning in attempting to call a Pastor.

Choosing a Pastor Based Upon A Majority Vote

Without question, the most common method used today by churches seeking to find a new Pastor is the method used by the first church when, at the suggestion of the apostle Peter, that assembly attempted to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot. This account is recorded in the book of Acts, chapter one verses 15-26. The rationale for churches today using this example to call a Pastor is because this passage of Scripture contains the only biblical record of the members of a New Testament church attempting to select a replacement for a fallen leader.

The writer addressed the absurdity of using this example for "calling" a Pastor in his book, "Discovering Acts". This rather lengthy quote from that book should prove helpful:

As mentioned earlier in this study, waiting is one of the most difficult things for humans to do. There is an old saying that is

appropriate here, "let's do something even if it is wrong." It seems clear that the Apostles, or at least Peter, was of this persuasion.

Now, it must always be remembered that the Holy Spirit superintended the writings of the Bible; however, not all of the actions of men, which were accurately recorded in the Bible, are godly or good. In other words, the Bible accurately records even those actions of men that were not good or honorable. It seems clear that Peter became restless while just obediently waiting, but he had no other command from the Lord. Verses 15-26 record the action that followed:

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David

spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be or-

dained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

It is not an uncommon practice for religious people to use the Bible to provide cover for doing things that are outside the plan of God. In fact, one could justify almost any sort of behavior by using Scripture that has been taken out of context. In these verses, the Apostle Peter had obviously grown weary with just waiting. Evidently,

he had become concerned about finding someone to fill the place left vacant by Judas Iscariot. Judas was never a member of the church that Jesus built because he had never been saved. No one but Jesus, however, knew the heart of Judas.

Surely, Peter thought, the selection of a replacement Apostle would be something they could do while they were waiting. So frustrating is waiting, when it is seen as inactivity, that men become restless. While their lives could hardly be described as boring, Peter, as many believers today, had to have something to do. In his thinking about the abandonment of Jesus by Judas, his memory returned to an event in Jewish history. King David was betrayed by his trusted advisor Ahithophel when David's son, Absalom, drove him from the throne in Jerusalem. The sad account of the betrayal of King David by Ahithophel is recorded in 2 Samuel 15. The similarities were remarkable to Peter! He even said that the account of this event was specifically inspired by the

Holy Spirit to be a reference to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Peter said it, but that does not make it correct!

Peter referred to two portions of the book of Psalms in arriving at the conclusion that God was leading them to select a replacement for Judas. The first reference is found in the sixty-ninth Psalm which is attributed to King David. The content of this Psalm records a cry from David in a time of distress. It may, or may not, have been a reference to the specific revolt by his son, Absalom. However, concerning his enemies, David said in verses 17-26:

“And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily.

Draw nigh unto my soul, *and* redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies.

Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries *are* all before thee.

Reproach hath broken my heart;
and I am full of heaviness: and I looked
for some to take pity, but *there was*
none; and for comforters, but I found
none.

They gave me also gall for my meat;
and in my thirst they gave me vinegar
to drink.

Let their table become a snare be-
fore them: and *that which should have*
been for their welfare, let it become a
trap.

Let their eyes be darkened, that
they see not; and make their loins con-
tinually to shake.

Pour out thine indignation upon
them, and let thy wrathful anger take
hold of them.

Let their habitation be desolate;
and let none dwell in their tents.

For they persecute *him* whom thou
hast smitten; and they talk to the grief
of those whom thou hast wounded."

As mentioned earlier, David gives no specific reference to the identity of the enemies about whom he was speaking. Indeed, Absalom and Ahithophel may have been the subjects of this Scripture reference; however, the wording of verse 25 was changed by Peter. In this verse the third person plural personal pronoun "their" is used while in Acts 1:20 Peter used the third person singular personal pronoun "his". While it is possible this reference to the betrayal of David by Ahithophel may have been prophetic with regard to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, it was apparent to no one but Peter.

Peter further referenced a quote from Psalm 109:8, which states: **"Let his days be few; and let another take his office."** In this verse, David was again speaking about his enemies. Here David was apparently referring to a single man. This reference may, or may not, be directed toward Ahithophel. There is simply no way to know for certain; yet, Peter concluded that both of

these references were inspired by the Holy Spirit to bolster Peter's contention that Judas must be replaced. Subsequent reading of the book of Acts will prove that Peter was wrong!

Peter then, without direct command, set forth his assumed qualifications for the replacement Apostle. He assumed that the experiences of the original Apostles would be necessary for anyone to be considered for this office. Now, it must be remembered the only command given to this church was to wait. Yet, Peter concluded from the Scriptures that other actions were required. Evidently, he did not think about the fact that Jesus, Himself, chose the original Apostles without input from any man. He noted two qualifications for this office: First, the candidate must have been baptized by John the Baptist. Second, the candidate must have been with the other Apostles as they followed Jesus.

Having reached this conclusion, Peter reached further into the domain that be-

longs only to God. He concluded, **“must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection”**. In his mind, this action was required immediately. It is interesting to notice how that one incorrect conclusion regarding Scripture will almost always set in motion subsequent actions which may very well not be in accordance with the Word of God. One can clearly see the necessity of correlating Scripture with Scripture and prayer before undertaking action not specifically commanded.

Following his conclusion that this church must fill this vacancy, the Apostles, under the direction of Peter, appointed two candidates, which they deemed to be qualified for the position. It should be especially noted that the Apostles appointed these two men! There is no mention of the Apostles asking God for His approval of their action. The action simply followed the logic by which Peter reached his faulty conclusion. So, they selected Justus and Matthias. No doubt, these men were fine men who loved

the Lord and were held in high esteem by the rest of the church. Having selected these two men, they then prayed and asked God to select which one of the two He had chosen! How audacious, yet, how common for believers or churches to set requirements and select options and then ask God for His choice! The obvious problem in this circumstance was God had not chosen either man!

This portion of the book of Acts has been widely used as the prescribed method for churches to use when calling a new Pastor. The normal process involves selecting a "pulpit committee" that will begin to research potential candidates for the position. The church is then asked to hear from two to four of the screened candidates. After hearing the candidates, the church often calls for a vote of the body to determine the will of God. God's will, however, cannot be determined by a majority vote of any church! Indeed, God does have a perfect will for all believers and all churches. The

only reliable method, however, for determining His will is through prayerfully seeking His direction and the study of His Word. When this process is ignored, the church will find a majority winner, but not necessarily the will of God. The will of God is absolute and must come from Him. There should never be a contest to determine the will of God!

Having limited the choice of God to Justus or Matthias, they then voted. Clearly, the will of God became an early casualty of this flawed process. The members of the church chose Matthias to be the replacement Apostle for Judas. God was hardly consulted regarding this matter except for the formal prayer. This is not the way to replace an Apostle or call a Pastor. Many use the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:19 to state the premise that whatever a church votes to do must be accepted in heaven. Jesus said in this verse: **“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever**

thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

W. A. Criswell, in the notes in his "Criswell Study Bible" states regarding the absurdity of this concept:

"The expressions "shall be bound in heaven" and "shall be loosed in heaven" are examples in Greek of the periphrastic future perfect passive construction and should, therefore, be translated "shall have been bound already" and "shall have been loosed already" in heaven. In other words, Peter's pronouncement of "binding" or "loosing" is dependant upon what heaven has already willed rather than upon earth's giving direction to heaven." (Criswell, Criswell Study Bible, 1979, p. 1134).

This notion is silly beyond belief. God has a perfect will for all of His children and all of His New Testament churches. He delights in showing His will to His children.

In this case, His perfect will for the church at Jerusalem was to wait!

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the Bible knows that there is, indeed, a twelfth Apostle and his name is Paul. He did not meet the qualifications set by Peter; yet, he was selected by Jesus Himself. One may rightly ask what became of Matthias, because he is not mentioned again in the Bible! He may have spent his life trying to fill an office for which God had never appointed him and for which he was not qualified. What a miserable way to live!" (Hoppert, p. 52-59).

Since this last example of a church attempting to call a Pastor based upon a majority vote of the congregation is the most common method used in conservative churches today, a closer examination of the process will prove helpful. It should be noted at this point that the following examination will not fit precisely the specific method followed by any one church; however, at least some of the components of this process will be found in almost all churches in their quest to find a new Pastor.

As a church finds herself without a Pastor, the first action taken by the members of the church will be to elect what is known as a "pulpit committee". This committee is generally comprised of several men in the church. Sometimes the church will elect to have the Deacons serve as this committee. The function of this committee will be two-fold: First, this committee will be responsible to find preachers to "fill the Pulpit" until the new Pastor is found. Some churches will assign this committee the responsibility of recommending an "interim Pastor" to serve the church by preaching and conducting other services until a "permanent" Pastor is found. This committee will normally assume this responsibility to find someone to "fill the pulpit" as their primary responsibility.

Once enough men are in place to "fill the pulpit" for a month or more, the committee will generally then ask the membership to submit names of prospective Pastors. The committee will also contact the local seminary and request names of students who may be ready to fill the office of Pastor. The committee will then compile a list of prospective Pastors for the church. In compiling this

list, the committee members will "cull" the list based on many arbitrary factors. A partial list of these factors may include:

(1) The age of the prospective Pastor. This factor is deemed to be important because some members will express the desire that the new Pastor must be energetic. The value of a young and energetic pastoral candidate could hardly replace age and wisdom in the teaching of the Word of God; however, youth and energy continue to be desirable attributes for a Pastor.

(2) The ability of the man to "relate" to the kids. Although no one is quite sure exactly what this term means, many church members seem to think that it is quite important keep the kids happy.

(3) The monetary requirements of the prospective Pastor. This is a major consideration because the new Pastor must be "hired" within budget constraints. This normally means that the salary of the new man must be lower than the previous Pastor. This will provide room for salary increases (if he pleases the sheep!). If the committee perceives a man would require a larger salary than

the former Pastor, the man might be rejected for consideration. The rationale would be that such monetary requirement "must not be the will of God".

(4) Any negative rumors or gossip must be considered. The accuracy of such reports, however, will generally not be considered.

(5) The physical appearance of the man. His clothing must be in style, but not extravagant. Good personal grooming, shined shoes, absence of facial hair and appearance of robust health is necessary.

(6) The talents and personality of his wife will be important. It is unclear what this has to do with ones ability to accurately teach to Word of God or provide wise leadership for the church.

(7) The number, ages and sex of his children must be factored in as well.

Once this initial list has been examined and "inappropriate" candidates removed, the list will be presented to the church membership as a list of "good prospects". This list will generally be offered with an "unofficial" ranking of the best candidates as determined by the pulpit committee. The pres-

entation of this list will often be accompanied by a recommendation from the committee to invite the "top" three or four to come and preach "in view of a call". A further recommendation of the committee will generally be that a vote be taken after the last man on the list has preached. The order in which each man on the list is invited to preach is pivotal because, if all seem to be of somewhat equal ability, most frequently the church will "call" the last man heard. What the church does not know is that most Pastors know this process better than the church. In fact, if a man on this list really desires to be the Pastor of this church, he may actually "lobby" to be the last man heard!

Once the church adopts this list of prospective candidates for Pastor, the membership will instruct the pulpit committee to contact the men and arrange the time and order for the men to come and preach for the church. Normally, at least one or more of the men contacted will politely advise the pulpit committee that they do not "feel" it is the will of God that they come. The committee will report this information to the church and another man "lower" on the list will be

included in the "primary" list of potential candidates.

Once the process of hearing men preach "in view of a call" begins the membership will generally eagerly await the appearance of each candidate. The members of the pulpit committee will urge all of the members to be present as each candidate arrives. The church will almost always be filled with excitement and on their best behavior as this "parade" of candidates begins. The building and grounds will be polished in anticipation of this process. As each candidate appears and preaches, there will generally be a time set aside, in the afternoon or following the evening service, for questions and interaction with each prospective Pastor and his family. It must be noted that this "time for questions" is a time for the candidate to demonstrate his knowledge of the Bible and his orthodoxy. This time for "questions" will always be an advantage for the candidate. Indeed, only a truly inept preacher can be "tripped up" by questions from the members of a church. This entire "questioning" process, in which the members of a church "interview" a prospective Pastor, is not

dissimilar to school students interviewing a prospective teacher!

Following the last candidate appearing to preach "in view of a call", the church will be asked to prayerfully consider each man in preparation for a vote "to call" the next Wednesday night or the following Sunday morning. A sense of excitement fills the air as the members gather for the "vote to call". Sometimes there is a clear "winner", perhaps even a unanimous vote. In such cases, the members are ecstatic with the prospect and hurriedly notify the "winning" candidate. Most of the time, however, there will not be a unanimous vote for any one of the candidates. In such cases it is not unusual for the moderator of the church to ask for a motion that the church vote again and make the "call" unanimous. Under such circumstances that candidate will be notified that he received a unanimous call to be the new Pastor of the church. A veteran Pastor, however, will ask the notifying person whether the "call" was unanimous on the FIRST vote, or if there was a motion made to "make the call unanimous". This should not be necessary; however, if the original vote was

not unanimous, the candidate should be informed accurately! At this point, the candidate will inform the church that he will need to "pray about the matter" for a few days. Frankly, this is mostly a formality as the preacher has been praying about the matter, or he would not have come to preach "in view of a call"! If the Pastor decides that it is "the Lord's will" for him to accept the call, he will notify the church and begin preparations for moving to the new church.

Not infrequently, there will be no clear winner, or perhaps not even a majority winner. In such a case, the process must be repeated as needed. At this point in the process, the church will begin to become divided. As disappointment replaces excitement; reality sets in as the church goes back to the list of potential candidates and prepares to select the "BEST OF THE REST"! As the process continues optimism begins to fade as "prospects" rebuff overtures. Soon panic begins to set in as the members of a New Testament Church of Jesus Christ begin to realize they must face the prospect of having to "settle for the best they can do"! At this point in the process one must wonder about

the prospects of a church "calling" the Pastor that God has for her in light of such a convoluted process!

One truth that should grab the attention of the reader is that the "will of God" became an early casualty in this process. Surely, someone would think that God must have a better plan than the one that most churches employ in "calling a Pastor". The process just discussed amounts to little more than throwing darts at balloons in a carnival. The process is subject to manipulation by members of the church and even prospective Pastors. Obviously, this is not the way to "call" a Pastor. Certainly, most church members feel somewhat uneasy about the whole enterprise! Nothing written here is intended to impugn the motives of churches or Pastors as they are simply following traditions handed down to them by their predecessors.

In conclusion, it should be clear that something has gone terribly wrong when New Testament churches of Jesus Christ attempt to fulfill the responsibility for which only the Lord is qualified. One might rightly wonder about the possibil-

ity of a church, undertaking such responsibility, actually finding the Pastor God has prepared for them. Surely, there must be a better way! A New Testament church is no more qualified to hire, or "call" a new Pastor than sheep are qualified to hire their own shepherd. The writer understands this assessment will be met with shrill cries of protest from both churches and Pastors; however, this system of restricting the choice of God to the wisdom of man has gone on long enough! Surely, there must be a way to put God back in charge of this whole process. Until that day comes, many churches and Pastors will continue to suffer under a system designed by man and not God.

CHAPTER FIVE

How To Call A Pastor

By this point in the study the reader is apt to be discouraged about the entire traditional process of calling a Pastor. Indeed, the writer has made some of the very mistakes he has noted; as well as having observed others struggling with the very difficult question of how to determine the will of God. As noted in the last chapter of this study, most Pastors are honest and ethical in their efforts in the ministry. Only someone calloused beyond reason cannot sympathize with men, who have committed their lives to serving God, as they haltingly move from church to church in a frustrating "swinging door" ministerial life. Many God-called men spend much of their lives longing for that place where they can spend their life searching the depths of the Bible and sharing the riches they find with hungry souls. Certainly, most church members are also godly people simply struggling to do the will of God, yet, sensing the uneasy knowledge that something is not right.

As stated in this study, God does have a perfect will for His ministers and His children as they live out the mortal portion of their lives. Yes, they have read the words of Jesus when he spoke of "life and life more abundantly", yet, this sort of life experience remains just beyond the horizon and out of the reach for most. Trudging along familiar and sad trails, many conclude this "abundant life" must be meant for someone else. How sad to watch those, who "...have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost..." flounder in their search for peace and joy. How desperately they need the truth of the living God. Perhaps this was the condition of His children in the city of Corinth when God appeared to the apostle Paul in a night vision recorded in Acts 18:9-10 which state:

Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

In essence, the Lord told His frightened preacher, "Don't be afraid, no one will hurt you,

but I have many children in this city and I want them to learn my Word!"

Herein lies the answer for frustrated Pastors and members of the New Testament churches of Jesus Christ who blindly follow the traditions of their fathers rather than the Word of God in their service to the Lord. The answer lies in learning, following and then teaching the great truths of the Word of God. This is true for Pastors and the members of the churches of Jesus Christ. Immediately, one might counter that there are no specific instructions for assigning Pastors of New Testament churches. While that statement is true, that same statement could be made about the undeniable truth of the statement, "once saved, always saved"! While those specific words are not recorded in the Bible, the truth of these words is undeniably taught. For example, Jesus Himself said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." There could hardly be a more profound and compelling statement of the truth of "security of the

Believer". Yet, if the Word of God is not learned, followed and taught some children of God will struggle all of their lives doubting that great and comforting truth.

The Answer For Pastors:

Every Pastor has experienced the pain and indignity of having to perform duties for which they have not been called and are not qualified. Although the specifics may vary from case to case, every Pastor has found himself mowing the lawn, painting the building, unclogging stopped up toilets, cleaning the building and a myriad of other duties that keep him from the study of the Word of God. It is frustrating beyond belief for the Pastor who finds himself involved such work that is not what God called him to do. Often, these circumstances cause anger and resentment in the Pastor and hinders his fellowship with the membership and, indeed, with the Lord Himself. The real source of the problem in such circumstances, however, is that the members of such a church have never been taught the value of the Word of God. Perhaps an illustration will prove helpful. The father of the writer, who was also a Pastor,

was deep in study of the Bible on one occasion when a Deacon came into his office and demanded, "preacher, you are not doing anything, come and help me paint my house!" This incident caused deep resentment for many years when, in reality, the poor ignorant Deacon was simply revealing his total misunderstanding of the value and importance of the God assigned duty of a Pastor. The proper solution would have been for the Pastor to have kindly, but firmly, refused the request and advised the Deacon of the absolute impropriety of the request.

The ignorance of the Deacon, manifest in the above illustration, is simply the result of former Pastors who had neglected the correct teaching of the Word of God for years. Such neglect of Bible teaching is not unusual in many churches. Frequently, Pastors grudgingly agree to such unreasonable requests because they are afraid to anger a member of the church. Under such circumstances the Pastor may actually fear that he may be fired should he deny such an ignorant demand. Tragically, when Pastors do not correct such ignorance, both the Pastor and the members of the

church are harmed. This is not an isolated incident, for even the apostles of the first church started by Jesus Himself faced similar circumstances and applied the correct remedy. The account is recorded in Acts 6:1-7 which state:

And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and

Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

What a powerful example of the correct response to a difficult situation that threatened to take these men from their God-assigned duties. The apostles did not gripe or argue; rather, they simply gave instructions for the solution to the problem. It is refreshing to note the fact that there was no apparent fear of not pleasing the church members; rather, the apostles simply told the other members that the settlement of disputes was not their responsibility and would only distract them from their rightful duties. It must be noted that the correct solution resulted in a great blessing for the entire church body.

Pastors often forget the command Paul gave to young Timothy in Second Timothy 4: 2 that states:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." One might rightly wonder why Pastors of New Testament churches would forsake that great and clear truth for a sermon designed to evoke an emotional response by the hearers. Of course, the preaching of the Word of God will evoke emotional responses; however, the emotional responses must be the result of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit as He applies the Word to the heart of the hearer. Far too often the Pastor is judged on the basis of how "moving" his sermons are instead of how biblically correct they are. This is always a great mistake and frequently forces the Pastor to search for sermons that will be pleasing to the members of the church. Most Pastors know this pressure to develop sermons pleasing to the flock, rather than pleasing to the Great Shepherd of the Sheep! W. A. Criswell noted his own struggle with this sort of preaching in his autobiography, "Standing on the Promises". He wrote regarding his pastorate at First Baptist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma and the evolution

of his preaching from topical sermons to the exposition of the Word of God:

Looking back now, I am convinced that God sent us to Muskogee to help me learn to preach. God had seen me pacing the floor, wondering what topic to preach on next, and God had heard my crying out for His direction. The move to Muskogee was His loving and gracious reply.

I had been instructed in speech, elocution, debate, and declaiming. I had learned Greek and Hebrew and could translate both Old and New Testament passages into Oklahoma English. I had studied biblical exegesis and theology under some of the great minds of the century, but God Himself decided one day that He would have to teach me how to preach. And for that express purpose, He sent Betty, eighteen-month-old Mabel Ann, and me to Muskogee, Oklahoma, to the study of Dr. A. N. Hall, where God put me through a graduate school of His own...

My title for the Sunday morning topic was "The Supreme Request" and my evening theme was "the Most Tragic Word in the Bible." I didn't know it then, but on the very next day God would enroll me in His own special class on preaching. Not long after, my days of preaching topics would change forever. (Criswell, p. 158).

He continued to write about this life-changing experience after he encountered the wife of Dr. Hall in the study of her husband. There she presented the young struggling preacher with the Bible her husband had used for many years as he preached through the Word of God over the span of four different decades. He wrote after spending some time alone thumbing through that old Bible:

"Preach the Word, Criswell," I heard the cloud of witnesses exclaim in growing chorus. "You have said it a thousand times, but you have never really tried it. Preach the Word."

God's seminar in preaching had begun, and the Professor was making His lesson painfully clear. Why should I struggle to

think up topics and then set out to find biblical texts that support those topics, when I could let those inspiring and informative texts speak for themselves?

In A. N. Hall's little "Upper Room," in my private study in our parsonage, and in that carved oak pulpit in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church of Muskogee, God transformed my preaching. Suddenly, I found myself really proclaiming the Word, book by book, text by text, cover to cover from Genesis to Revelation. I felt new power. Instead of pacing the floor, stressed and anxious, trying to find some new topic to preach, I was pacing the floor with excitement caught up by the might and majesty of God's Word, eager to get on to the next text, to the next story, to the next book, eager to dig out the truth in every line that God's Spirit presented, and working through the Bible's pages that could save people from their sins and strengthen and comfort them on their journey. (Criswell, p. 160).

Sadly, many, perhaps most preachers never get to experience the convicting, healing and majesty of the Word of God because they feel compelled to "find a brilliant new sermon" in order to please the flock! Without question, much of the responsibility for this failure rests on the shoulder of the Pastor himself because of a lack of faith in the power of God and His Word. Whatever the cause, however, many Pastors continue to struggle to please men and not God. Consequently, they continue to neglect the great riches of the Word, thereby failing to nourish their own souls and to feed the flock of God! The members of the churches they pastor do not know the nature of the sustenance they so desperately need any more than a child knows they cannot long survive on a diet of candy and soda pop. No, the Pastor must, by faith in God, plunge himself deep into the Word of God so he might grow himself and nurture the people of God. Faith and courage, those are the attributes needed by the man of God to fulfill his God-assigned duty to "Preach the Word".

The writer is aware of the great deal of courage required from a Pastor to break the mold of

preaching crowd-pleasing "popcorn" sermons and begin to feed the people he pastors from the riches of the Word of God. Yet, he may rest assured that God will be pleased and will bless his efforts and His people will grow as they learn His Word. Yes, faith will indeed be the victory!

What if the Pastor has been following the old ways for a very long time, and is not even convinced that he is currently in the place God has for him? That is, indeed, a valid question. The answer will require a tremendous amount of prayerful soul-searching on the part of the Pastor. However, the answer is NOT to leave immediately, for God can turn even mistakes into great victories. As this study progresses, a Pastor may feel as though he is trapped because of financial and family pressure. The absolute first step is to prayerfully search his own heart, and seek the perfect will of God for his life and his family. He should do this and then patiently WAIT for heavenly direction. Indeed, not waiting was the mistake made by the apostle Peter as he impatiently lead the first church to attempt to select a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Do Pastors make mistakes in ac-

cepting the call to be Pastor of a church that is not where the lord wants them to be? Of course they do for they are only human and, therefore, are not infallible. However, the tragic cycle of changing churches every two or three years must stop somewhere! God does have the right place for the Pastor to spend his life, and it may well be exactly where he is currently serving!

As seen in this study, financial and family pressures are the enemy of honest soul-searching prayer by the Pastor. In the quietness of solitude, as the honest Pastor begins to ask the Lord for His perfect will, Satan will whisper words of doubt and fear in his ear. "What if you are not where God wants you to be? What will you do to provide for your family? You cannot simply trust God! No, you must use the common sense that God gave you and secure the immediate future for your family." These are the tormenting words that have kept God-called men bound in powerful chains of doubt and fear, in many cases, for years as they continue to be driven by circumstances from church to church. Yes, they know the real answer to their dilemma. In their hearts they understand

the true source of power for the man of God. Indeed, they have taught the liberating principles of faith from their own pulpit. The haunting words of Hebrews 11:6 resonate in their hearts; "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Yet, when faced with the real prospect of living by faith, many succumb to the temptation to walk by sight. This truth in no way is an attempt to belittle Pastors, or lessen the reality of the tormenting and immobilizing power of fear. Yet, walking by faith and trusting God to provide for the needs of himself and his family is the only safe repose for the God-called Pastor. To believe with all of his heart that he is serving the living God, and that He alone is the ultimate source of well being for him and his family, will energize the ministry of the man of God. Nothing less will do, for anything less will render him paralyzed by fear and circumstances and bleed the power from his life.

No man, who has ever been used in the service of the Lord, has escaped this benchmark struggle

with the agonizing decision to walk by faith and trust God, and God alone. Even the biblical giant of faith, Abraham, had to undergo this great struggle to experience the victory only unquestioning faith in God can bring. No one but God understood the incredible agony in the heart of Abraham when He told him to take his dear son, Isaac, and offer him as a burnt offering unto God. This incredible command not only defied logic but also, seemingly, contradicted the very character and nature of God! Why would God miraculously give Abraham and Sarah a son and, then, command Abraham to kill that son? The command made no sense to Abraham and he struggled with the decision. This struggle, though not mentioned in Genesis Chapter 22, is seen in Hebrews 11:17-19 which state:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,

Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.

This passage of Scripture, though brief, contains one of the greatest gifts of God through which, by intense scrutiny, He revealed the process through which Abraham went in overcoming his fear during this great trial. The writer addressed this struggle in his book, "Abraham, the Journey to Faith". He wrote:

Through all his trials and tribulations, the one thing that Abraham had learned emphatically was that God had never lied or failed to keep His Word. Now, at the moment of his greatest trial, Abraham began to reason. God had told him that "*in Isaac shall thy seed be called*", yet Isaac had no seed. God had said that "*Unto thy seed have I given this land*", yet Isaac did not possess the land. God had said, "*I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him*", yet that promise from God remained unfulfilled. All of the promises which God

had made to Abraham would have failed if God allowed Abraham to kill Isaac; that is, unless God was going to raise Isaac from the dead!

That was the answer! This is the fulfillment of the second condition which must be met before Abraham could offer Isaac. This condition is fulfilled by the use of the First Aorist middle participle "anadexamenoj" which is translated "*After embracing (for) himself the promises*". After reviewing the promises made to him by God Himself regarding Isaac, Abraham embraced these promises for himself, or as is so often the case with people of the charismatic persuasion today, he "claimed the promises" and stood upon them. Rienecker notes regarding this word: "to receive, to gladly receive. The idea suggested here seems to be that of welcoming and cherishing a divine charge which involves a noble responsibility (Wescott)." (Rienecker, 1982, p. 709).

Having examined his dilemma, Abraham had been convinced that God could not

lie and that His promises could not fail. Therefore, as he reviewed the promises of God regarding Isaac, Abraham embraced those promises and came to a profound conclusion. That conclusion is recorded in Hebrews, Chapter 11 and Verse 19 which states: *"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure"*. The Greek language of this verse will prove helpful: "logisamenoj oti kai ek nekrown egeirein zonatoj O Qeoj oqen auton kai en parabolh| ekomisato." The translation reads: *"after he concluded that God (was) able to raise (him) up, even out from (the) dead, wherefore also he received him in a parable."*

This account is one of the most incredible descriptions of faith recorded in the Word of God. What is most notable for Christians of today is the fact that God revealed the process through which Abraham went in order to arrive at his settled conviction. The decision to offer Isaac was not

made quickly or lightly; rather, it was made only after an agonizing examination of the Word of God Almighty. Abraham had nothing on which to base his hope but the Word of God. God did not reveal to Abraham that He would raise up Isaac from the dead, yet Abraham concluded that if God allowed him to kill Isaac, then God would have no choice but to raise Isaac from the dead because He could not lie. What logic! What faith! No wonder Abraham is called "The Father of the Faithful". (Hoppert, 1996, p. 138-140).

How encouraging are these words that absolutely confirm the timeless principles found in the Word of almighty God. The Pastor must absolutely settle the issue in his heart or he will spend his entire ministry captive to the debilitating power of fear and circumstances. This is the biblical answer to the question with which Pastors struggle: "Where would the Lord want me to serve Him?" Once this question is asked of his Lord, the Pastor must, in faith, patiently wait for the answer from above! Then, when God answers that

question, the man of God must follow and stay until he is directed elsewhere by the Chief Shepherd. He must not expect the way to be paved with roses for the work of the Lord is difficult; however, the Pastor will know, beyond question, that he is where he is supposed to be.

The Answer For Churches:

There are two issues involved in the answer for New Testament churches of Jesus Christ knowing the will of God and finding the man God would have to be the Pastor of the church.

The first issue that must be addressed is to determine the God-assigned duties, or "commission" of the churches of Jesus Christ. This subject is so fundamental, and the answer so obvious that one must wonder why the members of most churches continue to struggle with the question. Just before He ascended back to heaven, Jesus spoke to the church He, Himself established during His personal ministry on earth. He gave those frightened followers what has been called, "The Great Commission" found in Matthew 28:18-20. This passage of Scripture is so well known that even many Sunday School children can quote it:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Men, more able than this writer, have written much about the specific nature of the Great Commission; however, two things are imperative in understanding these verses. First, the specific recipients of these words must be identified. The two verses immediately preceding these verses (and the first phrase of verse 18) 18-20 hold the answer. They state:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

The recipients of this command were the eleven disciples; the eleven apostles that comprised the church that Jesus started. Correctly then, the Great Commission was given to the church Jesus started, with continuing authority to subsequent New Testament churches that would carefully follow His teachings. The continuing nature of this commission is found in the promise of the Lord, "...and , lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." A. T. Robertson, in his book, "Word Pictures in the New Testament", writes regarding the meaning of this phrase:

I am with you (eto meta humon). This is the amazing and blessed promise. He is to be with the disciples when he is gone, with all the disciples, with all knowledge, with all power, with them all the days (all sorts of days, weakness, sorrows, joy, power), till the consummation of the age (hous tes sunteleias tou aionos). (Robertson, 1930, Vol. I, p. 246).

These eleven men to whom Jesus was speaking died long ago, and long before the "consummation of the age" (until Jesus comes again); therefore, if the commission was limited to these men alone, then, the commission died when these men died. Indeed, these words must be applicable for all scriptural New Testament churches existing until Jesus returns.

The writer will not burden the reader with an exhaustive recitation of the translation of the Greek language of this passage; rather, he will attempt to give a cogent statement of the essence of these words. There is one Aorist participle, one Aorist imperative and two present active participles contained in the Great Commission. The essence of these words is: "As you go, make disciples, baptizing them (disciples) in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them (disciples) to carefully attend to doing all the things I commanded you. And I, Myself will be with you until the consummation of the age."

There is no mystery that the imperative of the great commission is to "make disciples". Of course

the churches of Jesus would administer the ordinance of baptism to those who, having been taught, expressed a commitment to follow the teachings. Then, the work of these men would continue by teaching these disciples to carefully follow all of the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, the main commission given to the members of the New Testament church Jesus, Himself, began was to "make disciples". At this point, it would prove helpful to identify the nature of a "disciple" of Jesus. It is extremely instructive to note that Jesus, Himself, gave the requirements necessary to be one of His "disciples". These requirements are found in Luke 14:25-26 which states:

And there went great multitudes with him; and he turned, and said unto them,

If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Obviously, Jesus was not speaking of "hate" in the modern day sense of the word; rather, He was referring to the priorities of the life of those who would be His disciples. W. A. Criswell, in the

notes of his "Criswell Study Bible", noted the meaning of this teaching of Jesus. He wrote:

In a similar situation Matthew records Jesus as saying, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37), and this can be regarded as an authentic interpretation of that which Luke records as hating one's relatives. (Criswell, 1979, p. 1216).

Jesus certainly elevated the requirements of discipleship in this teaching. Indeed, most people are not comfortable with the idea of putting Jesus and His work ahead of the normal family relationships. Yet, this level of commitment must not be diminished in teaching the requirements of discipleship for Jesus certainly will in no way diminish them. The misunderstanding of this extraordinary level of commitment required to be a disciple of Jesus Christ lies in a failure to understand the very character and nature of the teachings of Jesus.

Every human being has a priority list of those things, or people, he deems to be important. This list is not written down on a legal pad safely

tucked away in a vault somewhere; yet, it exists in the very essence of his mind. Most humans would think it normal to place the very individuals named by Jesus at the very top of such unwritten list. Yet, this list of preferences, or priorities, reflects a subtle disobedience to the Word of God. Indeed, such priorities violate the first of the Commandments of God recorded in the book of Exodus , Chapter 20. Moses recorded the first commandment in 20:1-3, which state:

And God spake all these words, saying,
I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

These commandments of God were repeated in the book of Deuteronomy 5:1-21. Indeed, Jesus Himself, repeated the essence of this first commandment when a lawyer who was trying to trap Him questioned him. This incident is recorded in Matthew 22:35-38 which state:

Then one of them, *which was* a lawyer, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying,

Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND.

This is the first and great commandment.

There are some who would quickly counter that the Law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross. This teaching, however, denies the very character and nature of God, for He is perfect and, therefore, incapable of teachings things that are imperfect. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the full debt incurred by all humans because of their violation of the Law of God. The price was paid in full, and God would graciously apply this payment to the account of any human who would believe in Him and, by faith, accept His offer. Yet, make no mistake, the perfect law of the holy and righteous God has never been

annulled, and violation of that law has consequences. For the individual who has never been saved, the consequences are eternal in nature. For those who have been saved by the grace of God, violation of His law results in an interruption in fellowship with God. There will, however, be no eternal punishment for the violation of His law because Jesus paid the eternal penalty for the sins of the saved. Those who teach that the law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross do harm to children of God today for there are, indeed, consequences to the sins of the believer. One of the consequences of having anyone or anything more important than God in his life will render the believer incapable of being a disciple of Jesus Christ!

The correct teaching of this truth is not harsh at all when the believer understands that he can never love his relatives more than when He places God at the very top of his list of priorities. When he loves God more than anything or anyone else, he will then love his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters more than he ever could otherwise. The churches of Jesus Christ must

teach this truth, or else the young believer will be hindered in his fellowship with his Lord! Perhaps, just here, this absence of teaching reveals the reason for much of the impotence seen in New Testament churches today. Teaching young disciples to carefully attend to doing all the things Jesus taught is the responsibility of the members of the churches of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, making disciples and teaching those disciples is the primary work of a New Testament church. Having identified this primary responsibility, much clarity is found in observing the activities of many churches today. A myriad of activities and social events mark the misplaced priorities of many churches as they struggle to find that which, in their minds, results in some sense of "success".

A further value found in accurately understanding the God-assigned duty of the churches of Jesus Christ is that it reveals the qualities of the Pastor such churches should seek. They should realize that the greatest attribute for the Pastor of a New Testament church should be found in his ability to "teach the Word". The convergence of the

duty of a Pastor, as seen previously in this study, and the duty of a New Testament church is in marvelous harmony. Simply stated, a church of Jesus Christ needs a Pastor who is able to teach the Word of God! Amazingly, this is not the primary attribute sought by many churches as they seek to call a Pastor.

The second issue that must be addressed in finding the answer for churches, who are without Pastors, is to seek biblical principles for such an endeavor. The first biblical principle is that a New Testament church has no authority to seek a Pastor on her own. Such an important task belongs only in the hands of God. Yet, most church members, sensing a need to do something, feel powerless and frustrated with such an answer. As seen previously in this study, unwilling to wait upon the Lord, most churches search for a Pastor like blind men groping for the wall. Over the years traditions have been established that have no biblical precedent, yet have become unwritten laws for subsequent generations. The reason for the difficulty is that patiently seeking the will of God requires faith; indeed, a rare Christian quality! Yet,

as with the Pastor, the words "But without faith it is impossible to please him..." haunt most church members. There must be biblical principles for replacing a Pastor since there are no specific directions in the Bible, and indeed, there are!

Since the primary biblical duty of a New Testament church is to "make disciples", it would follow that the main occupation of such churches should be teaching the Word of God. In order to teach the Word of God, the members must first be taught themselves, and as has been demonstrated, that is the work of a Pastor. This truth seems to present a circuitous problem for a church without a Pastor. Perhaps this problem may have been caused by years of churches neglecting their primary responsibility of teaching the Word of God and making disciples. One might ask what teaching the Word of God and making disciples has to do with finding Pastors for the churches of the Lord? The answer is so profoundly simple it has evaded the grasp of churches for generations. The answer is that in the disciple making process, God will be preparing men for the work of a Pastor within that very church.

It seems clear that a church of Jesus Christ should, properly, be described as a school for disciples. If a church properly understands her role and seeks to conduct her activities in harmony with the Word of God, it would seem most logical that some of the disciples being taught the Word of God would sense the call of God to be a Pastor. In the process of time and teaching, it seems quite reasonable that a man would emerge as the logical and clear man God would have to lead the church when the older Pastor dies, becomes disabled or retires. Such a condition would remove all doubt and anxiety from the "process" of calling a new Pastor. God would have a man prepared and in place before the need arose! Unfortunately, this is hardly ever the case in churches today. Indeed, the common way of dealing with such a man is to assume that God will almost certainly "call" him to be the Pastor of another church (where he is not nearly as well known). This "common" way of dealing with such a man is for the Pastor to encourage the young man to move on to another church as soon as possible. Such action is, not uncommonly, the result of the current Pastor feeling

insecure and threatened in his position. How sad to watch this process, by which the Lord could be lovingly preparing the next Pastor of the church, be interrupted by pushing the man away. This pressure to leave, often preempts what could be a much-needed time of nurturing and training. Obviously, God could be preparing the man to be Pastor of another church; however, He might just be preparing the next Pastor for that church! Since this process, though totally biblical, is hardly ever seen in churches today, most churches face the agonizing process of trying to find a new Pastor over and over again. There must be a better way!

Failing to allow God to raise up a new Pastor from inside the church itself, when the Pastor leaves, for whatever reason, the church is faced with an old familiar dilemma. Perhaps, at such a time of crisis, the church should determine to turn to the Lord for direction. The writer believes there is, indeed, a way to put God back in charge of finding a Pastor for one of His churches. There are four appropriate questions the members of a church without a Pastor should ask themselves.

The first question is: Does God know the church is without a Pastor? The obvious answer to that question is, of course He is fully aware of the needs of His churches. No church member would ever deny this obvious fact.

The second question is: Does God want this church to have a Pastor? Now, this question demands more than just an immediate affirmative reply! The obvious first response would be, of course; however, perhaps the church has some house cleaning to do before she is ready for a new Pastor. As seen earlier in this study, circumstances may exist in the church that resulted in such turmoil and conflict that resulted in the former Pastor leaving. If such was the case, then, the members of the church should examine the real cause of such conflict and turmoil. Indeed, it would be cruel and unwise to bring in a new Pastor and expect him to solve pre-existing problems within the membership. The truth of the matter is that some of the reasons for the conflict and turmoil may be long-standing problems between the members of the church. While traditional wisdom may assume that a new Pastor can solve the prob-

lems within the membership of a church, such is not always, or even frequently, the case. A totally biblical response by the members of the church would be to seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation with each other BEFORE a new Pastor is sought. Yes, this action will cause some soul-searching and, perhaps even, distress on the part of the membership; yet, it would be grossly unfair to expect a new Pastor to solve long-standing personal problems. These problems should be resolved BEFORE a new Pastor is sought. Yes, some members of the church might leave rather than stay and resolve the problems; however, the church will be more likely to engage in the biblical duty of the church without such unrepentant members. So, the answer to this second question may very well be, "not yet!"

The third question is: Does God already have a man chosen and prepared to be the Pastor of this church? Given the omniscience of God and His gracious desire to provide the absolute best for His children, it would be absurd to think God does not only have a man prepared, but the right man prepared for that church.

The fourth question is: Can the members of the church WAIT for the Lord to send His man to them? This question reveals a fundamental fault with New Testament churches today, MOST MEMBERS DO NOT TRUST GOD! As the answer to this question is pondered, most church members will experience a numbing paralysis in their hearts. Immediately they begin to imagine the worst-case scenario; "What if God does not send anyone?" "How will we recognize him?" "What if some other church finds our Pastor before we do?" All such questions are silly beyond belief when one understands the character and nature of God. If God does not send a man immediately, perhaps the church is not ready for a Pastor. Perhaps, the church members must spend some time in soul-searching prayer. Then, the most awesome and revealing truth of all: NOT EVERY GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT THINKS THEY ARE A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS REALLY ONE! The truth of the matter is this: this is a time to WAIT ON THE LORD. If problems exist, He is quite capable of revealing them. These problems should be resolved in a biblical manner; personal offences

must be forgiven; grudges must be confessed to God as the sin they are. When the time is right, one may rest assured that God will lead His man to His church! His timing may not be their timing, but His timing will always be perfect.

In conclusion, His man may not be the best looking, or have the most imposing intellect, but he will be the RIGHT man for that church. Very simply, it is time to put God back in charge of selecting and preparing men to be Pastors of His churches. This is His responsibility and only He can do the job right. Heartbreak and sorrow beyond description can be avoided if the churches of Jesus Christ will do their work and allow God to do His! Therefore, if the reader has reached the conclusion that he does not know how to call a Pastor, he is absolutely right! He should proceed no farther than laying the whole matter before God in faith and then wait!

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