

A Blessing on Our Pastor's Head

James Montgomery (1771–1854)

A blessing on our pastor's head,
Lord God, we fervently implore;
On him this day a blessing shed,
For life, for death, for evermore.

For all that Thou in him hast wrought,
For all that Thou by him hast done,
Our warmest, purest thanks be brought,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Thy Son.

To Thee he gave his flower of youth,
To Thee his manhood's fruit he gave,
The herald of life-giving truth,
Dead souls from deathless death to save.

Forsake him not in his old age,
But while his Master's Cross he bears,
Faith be his staff on pilgrimage,
A crown of glory his grey hairs.

With holier zeal his heart enlarge,
Though strength decay, and sight grow dim,
That we, the people of his charge,
May glorify Thy grace in him.

So, when his warfare here shall cease,
By suffering perfected in love,
His ransom'd soul shall join in peace
The Church of the first-born above.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Desiring a Good Work

Kevin T. Bauder

Significantly, 1 Timothy 3:1 speaks of a man desiring not only the office of a bishop but also its work. Paul qualifies this statement by noting that a bishop's work is a good work. This work falls broadly into three overlapping categories.

First, the bishop is also an elder. As an elder, he leads through his preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17). He also leads through his example (1 Pet 5:3). An elder's ability to handle the Word and to internalize it are critical to his ministry. The work of an elder is a work of the mind and soul: he studies the text of Scripture, ponders it, and applies it for God's people. The bishop-elder lives in the nexus between the world of ideas and the world of practice.

Second, the bishop is also a pastor. He is Christ's under-shepherd who cares for the flock. He tends their souls during the challenges of life. Like his Master, he knows his sheep and can call them by name. He enters into their lives, sharing their sorrows and blessings. He weeps with them and rejoices with them. He watches over Christ's lambs, knowing that he will eventually give account for their souls (Heb 13:17). The pastor-bishop performs a labor of caring and lives in the world of relationships.

Third, the bishop is an overseer. He holds the general responsibility for the ongoing work of the church. He is certainly not the head of the body, but neither is he just another member. He is like the connective tissue that keeps the body's members functioning together (Eph 4:16) so that the body can grow. He is naturally in the best position to sense the overall needs of the body. While he does not make decisions for the church, he does direct the church as it makes decisions. He is responsible to see that all members are informed. He is responsible to ensure that each member has a voice and is free to choose as the Word and Spirit may lead. He enables the timid to be heard and prevents them from being trampled by the boisterous. As overseer, the bishop does the work of coordination and lives in the world of organization.

No individual is equally gifted in all these areas. Some pastors are better preachers and teachers. Some are better at relationships. Some are better as administrators. Almost no one truly excels in all three areas.



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Perhaps that is why Christ saw fit to institute the office of deacon. Deacons do not have the role of providing spiritual leadership. Preaching and teaching are not part of their office (though a deacon who is gifted in those areas may preach or teach, as Stephen and Philip did). Deacons assist pastors in tending to the material needs of the congregation and in administering its organizational initiatives (Acts 6:3). If they are performing this work well, they will not only relieve the pastor of much unnecessary trouble, but they will also have a finger on the pulse of the congregation. They will become a pastor's advisers and counselors.

A pastor should be able to trust the church's deacons with some part of the care of the flock. He should also be able to trust them with a significant portion of the administration of the church. When it comes to the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures, however, the pastor remains solely and personally responsible. Even though a church will have other teachers besides the pastor, he bears the responsibility of overseeing all that is taught within the church, through whatever venue.

An effective pastor must prioritize his preparation for preaching and teaching. He needs to have something to say, and he had better make sure that what he says is what God says. He is responsible to preach the Word, whether it is well received or not (2 Tim 4:2). In fact, the mark of an elder who leads well is that he *labors* in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17). A pastor's study will be his primary working station.

Nevertheless, he dare not neglect the other areas of his ministry. Some personal care can be provided by deacons, but church members need their pastors to be involved in their lives. Some of the organization of the church's work can be handled by deacons, but it still requires a bishop's oversight. The pastor who neglects these areas risks the ruin of his ministry, especially in churches where the deacons are less than fully effective.

Preaching is the most important thing that a pastor does, but it is not the only thing that he does. His proficiency in other activities is critical to his success as a preacher. People will often refuse to listen to a preacher whom they perceive to be callous toward them. They will be distracted from the best preaching if they are required to fight their way through slipshod organization. All three areas are genuinely critical to the success of pastoral ministry.

A good pastor ought to love the Word of God, and he ought to love teaching it. A good pastor ought to love people, and he ought to learn to communicate that love. A good pastor ought to love effective organization, and he ought to learn how to oversee it. Consistent failure in any of these areas is likely to doom the whole ministry to failure.

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

