Attention to Pastoral Self Care

LCMS Central Illinois Pastors Conference

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1. **The Problem of Self Care**

* How can pastors care for themselves spiritually?
* Two words from St Paul for guidance
  + Acts 20:28: ***Pay attention to yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.***
  + 1 Tim 4:16: ***Pay close attention to yourself and to what is taught (doctrine). Persevere in them, because if you do so, you will save yourself and your hearers.***
* Surprise: accent on attention to self before attention to teaching
* The peril of a pastor in ministry
* Care of others with spiritual self- neglect
* Giving without receiving
* Result: burnout/ compassion fatigue
* The use of secular instruments in the church for the appraisal of pastors
* Psychological or managerial models
* Focus on performance and popularity
* Political use by leaders
* Neglect of spiritual matters
* Pressure for pastoral self-promotion ► self-deception from desire for recognition and approval
* Honest self-appraisal as part of pastoral work
* Four areas for spiritual audit of ministry
  + Attention to conscience
  + Attention to protection from the enemy
  + Attention to anger
  + Attention to authority

1. **Attention to Conscience**

* What is our conscience?
* Modern equation of self-esteem with a good conscience
* Feeling good about ourselves and what we do
* Goal of therapy and new goal of education and worship
* Confusion of emotional mood with spiritual state
* Greek term: συνείδησις
* Literal sense: seeing the same as others
* Seeing oneself as others and God see me
* Awareness of how others see me or how I would like to be seen by them differs from the way I see myself
* Internalised voice of parents and those in authority
  + Modern psychological understanding of the sovereign conscience: own lawmaker, ruler, jury and judge
  + Biblical view of the conscience as inner umpire rather than law maker
* It does not make the rules but it applies them
* It is governed by God’s word as law and gospel
* It does not instruct me but receives instruction
* It does not pass judgment but receives the judgment of others and God
* The gift of a good conscience in baptism in 1 Pet 3:21: ***Baptism...now saves you, not as the removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***
* Ongoing reception of salvation from the risen Christ through baptism
* Connection between salvation and a good conscience
* Given in baptism: see Heb 10:22
* Because we are baptised we can appeal to God for a good conscience each day and be sure to receive it from Him
* Qualification for participation in the divine service: Heb 9:14
* Baptism is the foundation of life with a good conscience
* Paul in 1 Tim 3:9: ***Deacons must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.***
  + Deacon as assistant to pastor
  + Modern equivalent: seminary student on vicarage
  + **The faith** = what is believed rather than believing
  + Mystery of faith: presence of risen Lord as the bridge between heaven and earth
  + Lutheran emphasis on care of conscience as basis for care of souls
  + Lost dimension of pastoral work
  + Purpose of ministry: delivery of pure, clear conscience
  + Problem: how can I deliver clear conscience if I have a bad conscience?
  + Wrong reasons for bad conscience
    - Expectation of members and leaders
    - Own pervasive sense of failure
    - Misplaced sense of guilt: human demands rather than God’s word
  + Self promotion ► burnout
  + Confusion: person and works
  + Sabotage of ministry by bad conscience about my ministry
* Paul’s four avowals of a good conscience
  + Paul before Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1: ***My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.***
    - Greek verb *politeuein*: discharging obligations as citizen of a city state
    - Sanhedrin as God’s court on earth
    - Ananias as God’s representative
    - Amazing claim of good conscience
    - Basic orientation: duty towards God
  + Paul to Felix in Acts 24:16: ***So I strive always to keep my conscience blameless before God and man.***
* Felix as representative of humanity
* Double focus: God and man
* *Always:* daily, regularly
* Daily task in daily devotions and daily vocation
* Law and prophets as foundation for blameless conscience
* Conscience governed by God’s word rather than self as independent judge from the judgments of others
  + Paul in 1 Cor 4:4: ***I am conscious of nothing against myself, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.***
* Problem: appraisal of ministry by others or by self
* Pastors as stewards of God’s mysteries: need for faithfulness
* Accountability to God as the only Judge
* Danger of ignorant and premature judgment
* Working in the light of the Last Day
* Difference between the judgment of people and the judgment of their works (see 1 Cor 3:10-15)
* God’s judgement of works as good news
* Reception of praise from God
  + Paul to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:3: ***I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.***
* Thanksgiving: from the gift of clear conscience which perceives what is good in daily experience
* Link of clear conscience with daily prayer
* Daily reception of clear conscience
* Clear conscience as condition for service of God and enjoyment of God’s good gifts
* Ministry with a good conscience
  + God as my judge: person and ministry
  + Standard for conscience: God’s word as law and gospel
  + Misapplication of law and gospel by Satan to darken or dull the conscience
* Clear conscience from right distinction between law and gospel
* Paul’s charge in 1 Tim 1:5: ***The goal of this charge is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***
* Delivery of a good conscience about myself as a person through the gospel: justification by grace through faith in Christ and the gospel
* Result: assurance of salvation and God’s approval of me
* New questions for the justified person
* How can I be sure that God is pleasing with my work as a pastor?
* Which works please him and so meet his approval?
* Which works will last for time and eternity?
* Delivery of a good conscience about my works through God’s commandments: see 1 John 3:21-22
* Pleasing God by doing what he has given me to do as his agent and representative: his works in and through me
* Divinely instituted work that is done by me in my station and vocation: holy work as cooperation with God
* Positive role of the law: third use as cause of delight
* Call to ministry as privilege rather than a burden
* Importance of ordination and call for ministry with a good conscience
* Criterion for evaluation: faithfulness rather than apparent success
* Reasons for uncertainty about my work as a pastor
* Criticism from people
* Self-criticism
* Disobedience to God’s commandments and his agenda for my ministry
* Need to prove myself that results in sense of failure
* Spiritual attack by the devil
* Result of bad conscience about ministry
  + Search for approval, popularity and praise
  + Discouragement and burnout
* Conscience as the battle ground: contested territory
* Paul’s boast in 2 Cor 1:12: ***For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we have behaved in the world with the holiness and sincerity that are from God, not with worldly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so towards you.***

1. **Attention to protection from the enemy**
   * + Problem of conflict and criticism

* Dealing with antagonists
* Involvement in theological controversies
* Division of members into supporters/ friends and antagonists/enemies
  + - Paul in 1 Tim 1:18-19: ***Timothy, my son, I give you this charge…, so that by***

***following them you may fight the good fight*** *(strateia****), holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.***

* Neglect of teaching on spiritual warfare for pastors and psychologising it
* Misunderstanding of it: world as battle field
* Christians and pastors as target for spiritual attack
* Ordination as call to battle: officer in Christ’s army
* Conscience as primary battle ground
* Connection of spiritual warfare with faith in Christ and a good conscience before God
* Satan’s tactics: bad conscience ► shipwreck of faith
  + - Satan’s targets for attack
  + Church as target of Satan
  + Going for the top: presidents, pastors, leaders
  + Priority: destroying a congregation
  + Pastor and family as targets
  + Danger of moralising and psychologising this phenomenon
  + Pastor as first target
* Vocational attack
* Sense of idealism
* Pressure for success
* Failure to meet expectations
* Doubts about vocation
* Attack on calling
* Concentration on feelings rather than call at ordination
* Disheartenment: divided heart
  + Pastor’s wife as second target
* Living in a fish bowl
* Irregular hours and endless demands
* Poor pay and lack of appreciation
* Disappointment with the church and its leaders
* Sense of neglect by husband: no pastor for her
* Disillusionment with husband and repressed anger
* Satan in the bedroom with sex as the battle ground
  + Children as third target
* Trouble with children
* Pressure to be good
* Exaggerated guilt
* Sense of hypocrisy
* PK syndrome: playing up to get attention or gain acceptance of peer group
* Parental shame: need to manage household (1 Tim 3:4; Tit 1:6)
* Demoralisation of pastor and his wife
  + Shift of target and kinds of attack at different times
  + Need for spiritual protection of pastor, family and the leaders of the

congregation

* + - Doing sentry duty
* How do we help ourselves and others from spiritual attack?
* Answer in Eph 6:10-18: defence with God’s armour
* Key word: ***stand***
* Involvement in sentry duty rather than offensive warfare
* Guarding holy ground: people for whom we have the duty of spiritual care
* Working in the dark
* Use of ears rather than eyes
* Knowledge on need to minister basis
* Watching for the attack on ourselves and others
* Protection with God’s armour: already armed
* Key verses: ***Receive the helmet of salvation and sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers and requests, and staying awake for this with all persistence in requests for all the saints.***
* Offensive weapon: use of God’s word in prayer
* Sounding the alarm and calling on the champion to fight the battle
* Wielding the sword of the Spirit in prayer
* Covering for protection
* Standing in the breach for sin
* Thanksgiving for discernment of God’s working
* Reliance on Christ: borrowing his weapons and power
* Authorised power for sentry duty
* Sentry duty for family and congregation
* Task of pastor in Heb 13:17-18: ***Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch on behalf of your souls, as men who have to give account…Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.***
  + Note the term ***on behalf of your souls***
  + Pastors as intercessors rather than spiritual watch dogs
  + Connection with work of Jesus as our high priest who lives to intercede for us day by day (Heb 7:25)
  + Praying for members: those under attack
  + Basis for request for prayer from members
  + Connection between good conscience and keeping watch
    - Spiritual discernment
* Need for spiritual discernment in ministry
* Seduction of pastoral expertise and theological knowledge without discernment
* Use of wisdom with insight into self and others
* Discernment of spiritual realities as guided by God’s word and his Spirit on a need to minister basis
* Discerning the hidden hand of the spiritual politician who schemes to divide and conquer
* Discerning the hidden work of the Holy Spirit
* Exposing what is in the dark
* Disempowerment of Satan, the prince of darkness, by exposure
* Dealing with spiritual problems spiritually rather than politically or psychologically or theologically
* Avoidance of conflict as evasion of spiritual growth for pastor and congregation
* Constructive use of conflict and criticism: learning from critics as the mark of a wise person (Pr 9:7-9)
* Confronting the hidden enemy behind antagonists
* Example of Christ’s rebuke of Peter as the mouthpiece of Satan
* Learning to rebuke and correct by accepting rebuke and correction
  + - Self-examination
* Paul in 2 Cor 13:5: ***examine your selves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.***
* Danger of introspection: digging for dirt
* Call for unusual self-examination: doctrinal foundation
* Audit of faith rather than spiritual improvement
* Faith as reliance on Christ rather than self-confidence
* Basic issue: faith rather than innocence or spirituality
* Dealing with Satan by letting the light into the darkness in our souls
* Rat principle: point of attack
* Garbage as food for rats
* No garbage: no rats
* No darkness: no spiritual point of attack
* Use of Ten Commandments for spiritual self-diagnosis
* Guilt for sin
* Anger from abuse
* Handing over the problem to Christ in prayer
* Reception of absolution for sin
* Healing from abuse through the blood of Jesus in Holy Communion
* Faith in Christ and his word as our shield in spiritual warfare

1. **Attention to anger**

* Persistent anger as mark of spiritual trouble
* Anger as natural reaction to injustice
* Persistent anger as a work of the flesh: Gal 5:20
* Anger as an impediment to prayer
* Anger as a weapon of Satan: inflames and misdirects it
* Anger in the church: people and pastors
* Result: hatred, condemnation and rejection of the offender or pastor or congregation
* The pollution of the conscience by anger at offenses: bad conscience that see only what is bad
  + - Nature of anger
  + God’s righteous anger at evil and injustice: aspect of his love
  + Anger as neither good nor bad in itself
  + Positive: index of hurt and abuse
  + Negative: source of bitterness, hatred and vengeance against the offender
* Destructive use of anger
* Physical and verbal extroversion
  + - Anger ► bitterness ► hatred ►revenge
* Emotional introversion
  + Anger ► self-pity ►depression ►self-punishment
* Satan’s use of anger to attack the faithful by the back door



* + - Satan’s strategy
* Front door attack
* Temptation to sin
* Accusation of sin: guilty conscience
* Condemnation for sin
* Attack on assurance of salvation
* Weakening and destruction of faith in Christ
* Back door attack
* Attack on love for fellow Christians
* Satan’s use of our brothers and sisters to sin against us
* Tongue as his main weapon for abuse in the church: eighth commandment
* Danger for pastors: hurt by presidents and antagonists
* Sense of hurt and shame
* Replay of offence and magnification of it
* Sense of outraged self-righteousness
* Accusation and condemnation of them in our minds
* Anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred and rejection of them
* Passion for justice and revenge
* Satan’s use of God’s law to get us to condemn those who have sinned against us
* Destruction of love for brothers in Christ
* Withdrawal from the congregation
* Isolation from Christ and increased spiritual vulnerability
* Reason for Christ’s warning in Matt 5:21-26 about anger and his teaching on settling matters with those who have sinned against us
* Dealing with back door attack by dealing with anger
* See Eph 4:26-27 and 29-31 on the constructive use of anger:

***So then, putting away all falsehood,***

***let each of us speak the truth to our neighbour,***

***for we are all members of one another.***

***Be angry but do not sin;***

***do not let the sun go down on your anger,***

***and do not make room for the devil…***

***Do not let putrid talk come out of your mouths,***

***but only what is helpful***

***for building up others according to their needs,***

***so that your words may give grace to those who hear.***

***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,***

***with whom were marked as with a seal***

***for the day of redemption.***

***Let all bitterness***

***and rage and anger***

***and verbal abuse and slander***

***be taken away***

***together with all malice.***

* Unresolved anger: place, foothold for the devil
* Daily debriefing: offender or God
* Honest expression of anger with the reason for it
* Constructive rather than rotten speech
* Verbal abuse as grieving the Spirit
* Unloading onto Jesus: ***let…be taken away***
* Learning to lament and complain to God
* Problem of denial in ministry: angry pastors
* Hurt ► anger, disappointment, resentment
* Suppression of negative emotions: passions that control us
* Use of repressed anger by Satan
* Psalms of lament as resources for hurt pastors and members
* Set pattern for dealing with hurt
* Addressing God in trouble
* Confessing the trouble to him
* Description of trouble
* Complaint to God about lack of help
* Identifying the trouble makers as my enemy
* Appeal for justice from God
* Desire for revenge
* Handing over the case to God as Judge
* Petitions
* Help from God
* Intercession for the righteous
* Prayer against the enemies: wishes in jussive rather than imperative as recommendations to the Judge for consideration in sentencing a guilty person
* Promise of praise
* Need to debrief with God: unloading on him
* Disarming Satan by unloading on God
* Forgiveness of offender as the final stage in the process: Eph 4:32-5:2:

***Instead be kind to one another,***

***compassionate, gracious to each other,***

***just as in Christ God has been gracious to you.***

***Therefore be imitators of God,***

***as dearly loved children,***

***and walk in love, as Christ loved us.***

***and gave himself up on our behalf of us,***

***a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

* The promise in 1 John 1:9: ***If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all injustice.***
* Two sides to sin: sinner and victim
* Both trapped by what has happened
* Two solutions: forgiveness of sin and cleansing from abuse
* Cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7)

1. **Attention to authority**

* The stress of Jesus on authority in his call of the apostles (Matt 10:1; Mark 3:15; 6:7; Luke 9:1) and the 70 evangelists (Luke 10:19)
* The authority of the Father over Jesus (Matt 28:18)
* He speaks the Father’s words
* He does the Father’s work
* He obeys the Father’s commands
* His delegation of his own authority to the apostles and evangelists
* His authorisation to do the Father’s work together with him
* Their exercise of authorised power under him (Luke 9:1)
* Paul in Eph 5:21: *Be subordinate each to another out of reverence for Christ.*
* Misinterpretation as each to all others rather than all to another
* Notion of divinely instituted “order” in the world, the family and the church
* Order for the delivery of God’s blessings rather than for a chain of command
* Connection of “subordination” to headship
* “Headship” as divinely instituted position of responsibility in community
* Subordination as voluntary acceptance of one’s position under a given head in a divinely instituted order
* Difference between subordination and submission: attitude rather than act
* Practise of subordination as antidote to spiritual narcissism and individualism
* The subordination of each Christian to others as his heads
* Counter-cultural notion in ancient and modern world
* Confusion of spiritual authority with political influence and power
* Power as a limited ability
* Use at the expense of others
* Use by those who lack authority
* Proper use only by those have it
* Authority as an unlimited ability
* Use to authorise and empower others
* Growth with delegation to others
* Reception from another
* Need to be under spiritual authority to exercise it
* Headship as duty of spiritual care
* Pastoral office as the exercise of spiritual headship and authority
* Christ as the model for spiritual headship
* Purpose: health and growth of the body
* Audit of my exercise of headship
* Over my wife
* Over my children and grandchildren
* Over my congregation (students)
* Over my employees (?)
* Note two criteria for ministry in Paul
* Husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6)
* Management of own household (1 Tim 3:4-5; Tit 1:6)
* Importance of spiritual fathering
* Judging and approving
* Correcting and blessing
* Recognising and encouraging
* Audit of my practice of subordination
* To my father and mother
* To people in government
* To Christ and his word
* To my presidents: national and district
* To the pastorate of the LCMS
* To my confessor: mentor for personal accountability
* Subordination for reception and transmission of blessings in the three divinely instituted orders of family, church and society
* Problems of candidates for ministry who have rejected the authority of their fathers
* Interplay between authority, community and love
* Subordination as protection from spiritual attack
* Proper exercise of spiritual headship and authority as an essential part of spiritual warfare

1. **Conclusion**

* Christ as our Chief Pastor (1 Pet 5:4), the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet 2:25)
* Pastoral self care as attention to Christ’s care of us as pastors
* Ministry as working with Jesus by handing on what we receive from him
* Ministry as a joy rather than burden (Heb 13:17)
* Working for the progress in joy for our members (Phil 1:25)
* Goal: entry into the joy of our Lord (Matt 25:21).