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Conclusion

What makes a good church leader? Is it a man who is eloquent? Is it his dynamic personality? Possibly it is his administrative ability? Or his clever writing style? Maybe it is his status with an accepted group or denomination? It might even be, to some, his skill as a community spokesman?

Not hardly. Not, at least, in terms of the New Testament. Neither in the terms of history—at least in the life of Richard Baxter.

Richard Baxter lived from 1615 until 1691. He was born, grew up, ministered, and died in England—principally in London. He suffered through ill health, expulsion from both churches and denominations, imprisonment, and political misjudgments. Yet as a pastor, he touched lives ranging from the post-reformers of his day, to Christian statesmen who grace the Church today.

Richard Baxter had a passion for the pastorate, and for people. His best known work, *The Reformed Pastor*, speaks of the needs of Christian pastors, and Christian churches.

Concerning the relationships of elders, or overseers, to their flock, he wrote:

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It is the will of God that every church should have its own pastors....Now the size of the flock should be determined by the number of shepherds. All cannot be shepherded without enough pastors in a church, or a small enough congregation to look after personally. God does not impose natural impossibilities upon us. Does God then require of a bishop that he take charge of a whole county, or of so many parishes or thousands of souls that he is clearly incapable of looking after? Is it not therefore absurd for intelligent men to desire this ambition as a privilege? Happy is the...parish where the...elders can adequately supervise their flock.¹

Absurd? Intelligent men? Adequately supervise? Those words, written as if they applied to today, pierce the motives and methods of the church leaders of today as effectively as when they were first written. It is right and good for believers, in our day, to ask “why?” more often than “how much?” or “how many?”

Mr. Baxter also gave recommendations or guidelines for what are to be the priorities, or emphases, of leaders to the believers in a local church:

Here are some of the ways that you can make best use of the abilities of your members. (1) Urge them to be diligent in teaching and praying for their own families. (2) Urge them to step out and visit their poor, ignorant neighbors. (3) Urge them to go often to the impenitent and scandalous sinners around them, to deal with them in all possible skill and earnestness. Let them do so lovingly and patiently, in order to convert, reform, and serve their souls. (4) Acquaint them with their duty to watch over each other in brotherly love. (5) At your private meetings, or in days of humiliation, or in private thanksgiving, employ them in prayer.²

Conclusion

Again, the list sounds very contemporary. It assumes an understanding of the church, and its members, that is in every sense qualitative, not quantitative. It equips the saints for the work of the ministry. It emphasizes the priority of love and godly devotion. And it encourages a reaching out kind of neighborliness to those in need, and to those without Christ.

Lets jump ahead 300 years again. Remember our concerns about the place and authority of Christ as voiced by A. W. Tozer. Compare his conclusions:

*For the true Christian the one supreme test for the present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious much be the place our Lord occupies in it. Is He Lord or symbol? Is He in charge of the project, or merely one of the crew? Is Jesus Christ Lord in this act?*³

This article, published just two days after Dr. Tozer's death, noted three possible responses to these concerns. First, one could rise up *in shocking indignation* and reject what was written. Second, one could *nod in general agreement*—taking comfort in the fact that he makes up the clear exceptions to this rule. Or, third, we could *go down in meek humility* and confess how we have grieved the Spirit, and displaced Christ as Head of His Church, and seek to conform our thinking and behavior to the Scriptures in a way that places Christ—not just by lip service—as the actual Head of His Body.

As we have said, understanding the church, and its leadership, is not a complex subject. It requires an honest reading, and rereading, of the New Testament. And it requires discarding all custom and tradition in the pursuit of truth and holiness.

We have moved away from the starting blocks in this regard. There is a beginning of interest in pastors—instead of the pas-

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tor. There has been some writing about elders as pastors in the church.

But we need to go much farther—and at a much faster pace. We need to understand that the church requires of its leaders that they be not prophets or preachers, but elders. They must be elders who pastor and teach. And they, as pastor-teachers, must have such a love for God that they are willing to sacrifice reputation, and standing, in order to obey Him, and both model and teach a love for others that is greater than any love for self.

As our churches, by the grace of God, have leadership teams like this—ones who understand their accountability to God, and their accountability for the flock—then our churches will grow in their spiritual lives as they should. Our assemblies will be made up of leaders and believers who love God, and love others, and bring the two together.

By God's grace, and for His glory, lets do it together. Don't say: "I will—if he does—or if they do." Rather, say: "I will!"