

The Kingdom of God The Government of God – Pastors, Part 2

Sam Soleyn
Studio Session 54
08/2004

God truly desires to care for His people and His care cuts across all strata and runs through every facet of the government of God and in the work of the pastor, the day to day caring for and maturing of the saint is meant to take place. For this reason of course, the role of a pastor has to be more than someone who gets up and speaks on Sundays at a church. It is intimately involved with the life and the well-being of every member of the body of Christ. So God's care is meant to be as personal and as individual as you are. He does not engage in group-caring in the sense that sort of the "one size fits all" model. He doesn't simply put out information "out there" and you get it as you get it. No more than we would raise children in that fashion, no more would God raise His own children in general terms and unspecific attention and care.

One of the biggest concerns that people have today is this "disconnect" with what is perceived as the church but frankly, I don't see how it is possible for the model of church that we have today to do any different than what it is doing. Simply trying to make it [the church] kinder and gentler without changing the structure, the nature of it will not, for long, divert the people of God. The care of God's people is meant to operate on multiple levels beginning with, say, a young man who has just married a wife. How is he to learn to be an appropriate husband and as they have children, how is he to learn how to care for his children? Well somebody has to have disciplined him and made him ready. But the fact that he is a person of good character only qualifies him to be involved in a marriage.

The daily life, the daily activities—life lived out—is what requires oversight and accountability. So the Scriptures say, "Obey those in authority over you for they watch over your soul as those who will give an account." (Inserted – actual verse—"**Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.**" – **Hebrews 13:17a**) The matter of being accountable must attend the feature of anyone having authority. If you have authority, if God has appointed you over and given you authority with respect to the life of another and if God expects that "other" to submit to His authority operating through you, then whoever has been appointed in this fashion by God must, himself, be accountable. Otherwise it is a recipe for the abuse of

authority and for maligning the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and His ways, His Kingdom and His purposes.

Pastoring, therefore, shepherding, watching over the soul of another—all being complimentary terms—is inherent in the purposes of God for the maturing of those subject to God’s rule and indeed every believer is subject to God’s rule. But if you happen to be assigned authority because of the structure of God’s government and the order of His kingdom, then you who have been given authority have authority not inherent to you, but you have the authority of another, namely you have the Lord’s authority. So you are standing... to some extent you are standing in the Lord’s place. Therefore, as a delegate of the Lord, you are expected to be accountable and you, yourself, must be held accountable through oversight. You see, the Kingdom of God and God’s government that rules His Kingdom, is meant to apply to the way people actually live. It is not merely a collection of theologies to be advocated and membership to be secured based upon how people agree or disagree to adhere to those tenets of religion. It is meant to be a way of life for people to live. That being so, the care of God for His people is meant to take place at multiple levels.

As I began at the level of a young man who was married to a wife, how is that young man now to rule well his own house? Because before he can become an elder he must—in his own house—demonstrate the rule of Christ, ruling well his own house. When he has children he has to rule in such a way that his children have respect and honor for the things of the Lord... rule in such a way that his wife is sober-minded and not regularly rebelling against his rule; that he, himself, is not a carouser, is not a drunkard, he’s not given to the pleasures of sin, he’s steady, as befitting an example that we expect others to follow in the Lord. So how do people get there? How do people become mature? That’s the question.

Well, it begins with the fact that, as a young man, he is under the rule of his father. His father is then his pastor and as he grows up under the rule of his pastor/ his father, he is made ready for marriage. He is prepared for marriage in the ways that teach him consideration for others, care for others, the discipline of hard work, the discipline of restraint of various characteristics, and the like. If a young man comes to marriage without having been disciplined and trained by his father, then marriage is going to be—at the very best—an arduous and difficult road. Why are there so many divorces today—even among Christians? In fact, in the years that I directed a program called Christian Legal Aid, and kept information on the patterns of divorce, I found that the requests for divorce were exactly the same among believers as non-believers. Indeed, it made no difference whether one was a believer or a non-believer. It should have, but it didn’t. And routinely what you see is people having come to marriage who are unprepared for it.

So from the time a young man is in his home, his godly father is the one that God *expects* to watch over his soul. The Scriptures do not say, “Let the church ‘pastor’ watch

over the soul of the young man”. It says, “Fathers,”—this is **Ephesians 6**—“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; but raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Inserted – actual verse—**“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” – Ephesians 6:4**) What has happened of course is that in the present framework of church, the roles have been taken over—God appointed roles have been taken over by church leadership, whether or not those roles were initially committed to church leadership. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there even a hint that the pastor of a young man—or a young woman—is anyone but his or her father, particularly when the father himself is a believer.

What the typical church does—you know, the typical family church does—it invites the whole family to come to the church and it promises that there is a teacher for dad, a teacher for mom, a teacher for the various ages of the kids—“We’re a family church.” By doing that, we take from men the responsibility that God has given to them to grow up and to become mature and raise their own children properly. That’s why there are so few men qualified to be elders in the church today because the church has been ruling in their homes, by the church pastor taking the role of the fathers, relieving the fathers of the duty to grow up in the maturity of the things of God. As a result, there are few who are qualified to be elders because the basic foundation in which an elder is trained and taught to be an elder is that he “rules well his own house.” That’s what Paul said to Timothy in **I Timothy, chapter 3**. (Inserted – actual verse—**“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.” – I Timothy 3:4**)

If the church takes the duty of the father to raise his children properly away from the father, then the father has no other responsibility in God’s perspective—there is no other godly responsibility. Therefore that father—failing in his pastoral duty—will never mature. Now who trains the father to be a father? One of the older men... one of the elders. This brings us to what the Bible speaks about as the government of God, relative to pastors. The function is the care of people; the form however, has multiple layers and they revolve around three other words. What you do caring for people—shepherding the souls of people (These are Biblical terms, by the way. I am not speaking about the Shepherding Movement, but the fact that we have shepherds and bishops, pastors—if you are going to use the word “pastor”, you *are* using the word “shepherd” because the Greek word is “poimen” and it means “shepherd.”) Now, the analogy of course is to a shepherd and sheep—that’s why it’s used, because of a need for the sheep to be tended and cared for.

The government of God is meant to operate not on a congregational basis but on a national basis. What do I mean by that? God’s people are a holy nation—we are one people, one people. (Inserted – actual verse—**“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” – I Peter**

2:9) Jesus said, “Let them be one, Father, as you are in me and I am in you, let them be one in us.” (Inserted – actual verse—“ **‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’**” – **John 17:20,21**) And Paul said, “**Is Christ divided?**” (Inserted – **I Corinthians 1:13a**) The fact that pastors have no trouble at all dividing God’s people into their own individual flocks does not mean that the heart of God has changed, or the Scriptures have changed relative to the truth that we are one people. God’s government was meant to be operational over a nation of people, not over individual congregations. The problem we run into is the superimposition of the government of God upon a form that is inherently at odds with the government of God—the form of a congregation.

In the role of pastor there are multiple layers of care but the word “pastor” itself means: “to care for people.” How do you care for people? Well take into account the words that go with “pastor”. In addition to “poimen” or “pastor”—“shepherd”—is the word “elder”; also the word “presbyter” or “presbuteros” in the Greek; also the word “bishop” or “episkope”. These are all related to the care of sheep. “Elder”... we know it is related to the care of sheep because in **Acts 20**, Paul meets with the elders at the church of Ephesus and says to them, “Take heed to yourselves and to the flock (the flock—that’s about shepherds) over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers to feed the church of God.” (Inserted – actual verse—“**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.**” – **Acts 20:28**) To the elders he said that.

There is no conflict here between elders and shepherds. When you refer to shepherd, you are referring to the function; when you refer to elder, you are referring to the person and when you refer to presbyter, you are referring to the form and when you refer to bishop, you also refer to something of the function and certainly something of the form. What do these words then, in addition to “shepherd”, mean? An elder is described as one older in the Lord, one of maturity, one who himself has gone through everything, or most everything that anyone who is growing up in the Lord will have experienced, beginning with learning how to rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, having his wife be not a contentious woman. So he has learned that and the thing he has learned he is able to impart. So inherent in the concept of being a shepherd is being older and more mature for the purpose of making a disciple. Jesus sent us into the world not just to make converts, but to make disciples—make disciplined learners after the fashion of Jesus Christ.

So the term “elder” relates to one who is older, seasoned, more mature, who has gone through the things that the younger person is going to have to go through. The word “presbyter” from the word “presbuteros”, refers to a group—more than one—who together have the duty of overseeing the care of all of the people. So it tells us that the

highest local authority that rules over the body of Christ in a locality, in a particular city, is the presbytery of elders. So you'll frequently find Paul writing to the "elders" in Corinth, to the "elders" in Ephesus, to the "elders" in Smyrna. He says to Timothy that he laid hands on him together with the "presbytery"—the "elders" in the city of Derbe where Timothy was commissioned, according to the **4th chapter** of the book of Acts. (Inserted – actual verse—**“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” – I Timothy 4:14 KJV**)

So...to the "elders". Paul would often say, "To the elders who rule well..." (Inserted – actual verse—**“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” – I Timothy 5:17**) Now among the presbytery you will have multiple qualifications, that is: elders who have the capabilities of serving in different ways. Why? Because this is God's local government to take care of the people. Taking care of the people is primarily to look after their spiritual well being. Another entire level—not of elders, but of those with the gift of helps—is the function of deacons, and those are manifestations of the gifts of helps and they tend more to the physical needs of people. The spiritual needs of people are being taken care of by the elders.

In taking care of their spiritual needs, one of the responsibilities of elders is to bring discipline to the body of Christ. Paul writes to the elders of Corinth and he says to them, concerning a man who was living with his father's wife, he gives them instructions as to how to deal with this man including such things as, "If he will not turn, hand him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord". (Inserted – actual verse—**“Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” – I Corinthians 5:5**) So the discipline and care of the church is to be accomplished by elders.

Teaching and training and instructing in ways of righteousness is also to be accomplished by elders. Elders, for example, are to be apt to teach. Now today, the idea is that if you are the pastor you are the preacher, you are the teacher. Well if you don't have the gift of teaching, you should still be apt to teach, but if you have the gift of teaching then you are more apt to teach than somebody who is not. But the fact is first off, there is not a congregational model, we are a governmental model for a national entity. The people of God are a nation among the nations. But even in a congregational model we have one pastor and the elders usually see themselves as supportive of the pastor. Well that's nonsense; Biblically that simply is not accurate because there is a presbytery, comprised of elders who take care of the people, who pastor the people. That's how it works Biblically. Now admittedly, if it is your congregation and your vision, you don't want anybody else competing with you for leadership. The congregational model is about the work of an individual to which he recruits others in a subordinate position. That is not Biblical; it's not a model that is in the Scriptures. I don't know how many times I have

to say this but perhaps there are some people out there who are actually listening.

Why do you think that there is so much wrong with the church? Its very structure often is unbiblical so the things that are in the Word can never get to and can never function as they were meant to function among the people. So “pastor” then is the function, “elders” are older men, “presbyters” represent the entire government in that locality. In that government you will have elders who rule well so if there are disputes among the believers, elders should resolve it because there should be ruling elders. There are elders who teach, there are elders who serve in administration and so on and so forth. Again, this is not a congregational thing; if it is a congregational model, the obvious question is, “Who is the chief elder?” But it is not a congregational model; they work together much as a city government would. Now in a subsequent broadcast I will talk about how this Biblical alternative might function.

And finally there is “episkope” or “bishop” and that term is often used not only as a noun but also a verb, “to bishop your soul”, “the bishop and shepherd of our souls”. That’s an overseer. It means that—in that function—you look at the broad sweep of what is necessary and you may appoint others to take care of the individual needs but you are finally the one responsible. Somewhat like this: as the “bishop” over my wife’s soul, I do not provide her with dental services even though she may need dental services. I oversee the need so that if she needs dental services I pay her bill. I’m overseeing her, watching over her, shepherding her in the sense of an overseer or a bishop but it is the dentist who does the job. I help her select the dentist if she needs my help, but I certainly pay for it because it is my function in watching over her soul to provide that oversight for her. So when you put it all together what do you have? You have people under the care of the Lord who are watched over by older ones in the Lord, namely elders, who work together as a presbytery so that all the needs are met and they have oversight of the whole body of Christ in an area. Their function is to shepherd and care for the people—that’s how it works.

Pastor is “poimen”, elder is older, presbytery is a group and “episkope” or bishop is the watching over, seeing to it that it is done, “the buck stops here.” That’s a government. The care of God’s people sometimes is very personal and sometimes it functions broadly in a group. Sometime one person can meet the need and sometimes it requires multiple persons to meet the need under the oversight of someone who has the capability of doing that. The government of God, in the pastoral model is meant to function over a nation of people and not over a congregation and if you try to force it on a congregation it will produce the “chief elder” which is an unbiblical result. Now I want to continue in discussing the government of God and I hope you will join me as we consider the role of the teacher. After that we’ll look at the broad sweep and conclude. I’m Sam Soleyn and I’ll see you then.

Scripture References:

Hebrews 13:17a

Ephesians 6:4

I Timothy 3:4

I Peter 2:9

John 17:20,21

I Corinthians 1:13a

Acts 20:28

I Timothy 4:14

I Timothy 5:17

I Corinthians 5:5