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Philosophy of Ministry

Worship is at the center of man's being. Man is *homo adorans* not *homo sapiens*. This means that *worship* is what God created us for, not autonomous *thinking*. Our confessions support this view, for example, the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) starts with this declaration. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."ⁱ A minister, being a subset of "man," is a worshipper, but what differentiates him from other men?

A minister is a man God calls to lead His people. He is a shepherd, an officer in the church militant, a federal head of a local body in the church. Also, he is a slave of Christ, a servant to His people, and a priestly administrator of the sacraments. Finally, he is a prophet, a comforter, and an example. God calls the minister to represent Himself to the church in communal worship.

God has revealed Himself to men in and through His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled the types of salvation revealed in the Old Testament. He was the true Priest, the true King, and the true Prophet. Christ was the "True Man." All Christians represent Christ in the world. We bear His name, and we bear His offices. God has made us into a nation of kings and priests.ⁱⁱ He is making us like our Lord. In His magnificent wisdom, Jesus calls mere men to lead His bride, the church, through the pathways of time.

The minister uniquely represents Jesus Christ to the church in several ways:

1. As a Spirit-filled prophet, he preaches the Word, prays for and with his congregation, and counsels them about faithful Christian living.

2. As a gracious, Christ-like priest, he administers the sacraments, teaches the young and weak, and visits the sick and needy.
3. As a loving, Fatherly king, he bears the keys of the kingdom, directs the course of the church, and bears federal responsibility for the state of his charges.

These are high and demanding responsibilities. No man is worthy or capable of fulfilling them faithfully without the Lord's call, direction, and support.

The means of determining whether you are called are manifold. First, Paul tells us that the desire for the office of bishop is a desire for good,ⁱⁱⁱ and God grants that desire to those He calls. Second, Peter tells us that consequences for false teachers are dire in 2 Peter

2. So, men and boys should be warned of the gravity of such a call. If they are truly called, they will recognize the dangers involved and yet feel the desire. Third, the Bible gives us clear guidelines for eligibility for the offices of church leadership. (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1) If men are disqualified for leadership on the basis of these texts, they should accept God's will and seek other gainful employment or step down from office if they are already in it. Fourth, if the call is real, God will open the doors and bless the paths that bring men into the pulpit. Now let's consider what it is that God expects of men whom He calls to this position.

Spirit-filled Prophet.

As a Spirit-filled prophet, the minister preaches the Word, prays for and with his congregation, and counsels them about faithful Christian living.

A Preacher of the Word

The primary duty of a minister is to preach. This is the most visible, vital, and

demanding part of his office. The man who faithfully fulfills this duty is the man whose heart burns with the message of the Gospel. He proclaims with Paul, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16)^{iv} The minister must be clear headed and capable to communicate the teachings of Scripture to his people, but if he is not on fire with his message, he will never impassion his audience to listen and obey.

This “fire” within is the fruit of a vibrant and rich spiritual life in the preacher. He must be a man who is close to God. In order to effectively preach, the preacher must be filled with the Holy Ghost, and sent out by Him and the church. “How shall they preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:15) God told Jeremiah, “You shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.” (Jer. 1:7) Isaiah also received a commission: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.' And He said, 'Go, and tell this people...'" (Is. 6:8-9) God also sent the other prophets (Ez. 2:3; Hos. 1:1-2; Joel 1:1; Amos 7:15-16; Obad. 1; Jonah 1:1-2; 3:1-2; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; 2:2-3; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; 2:1,10,20; Zech. 1:1,7; 7:1; Mal. 1:1)

The Lord sent them, but He didn't just leave them on their own. He tells them, “I am with you to deliver you.” (Jer. 1:8) Moreover, He faithfully gives them His message for His people. We have the message He gave them in the Bible.. The minister who is called and sent must trust in God's faithfulness to provide him with the message that God has for His people in the minister's charge because the ability to preach is a gift.^v

Though preaching is a gift, it also requires some hard work on the part of the minister, because our God likes to use means. As pastor Douglas Wilson puts it, “God doesn't steer parked cars.” Faithful preaching requires diligence, wisdom, and grace. C. H. Spurgeon said that, “The solemn work with which the Christian ministry concerns itself

demands a man's all, and that all at its best. To engage in it half-heartedly is an insult to God and man.”^{vi} Moreover, Spurgeon demanded the highest quality of men for the office. “We require to have for God's ministers the pick of all the Christian host; such men indeed, that if the nation wanted kings they could not do better than elevate them to the throne.”^{vii} This means that ministers should be the cream of the crop, not the bottom of the barrel. They must be intelligent, capable, pious, and humble, because preaching is the application of God's Word to His people in their context.

This is a challenging task. Therefore a minister must be a perpetual student. First of all, he must be a student of the Word, in order to faithfully understand it and capably interpret it for his flock. Second, he must be a student of his people, so he can understand their needs and how best to communicate God's message to them. Finally, he must be a student of culture, so he can adequately equip his congregation for the various trials they will encounter, and his applications of the Word may be relevant to the world his parishioners live in.

The good news is that the Gospel is “the power of God.” Ministers declare it to the world and to God's people because “it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” (1 Cor. 1:21) The gospel is ever fresh and always relevant. Preaching has no excuse to be boring, because the Word certainly isn't. Sparks will never cease to fly when the sword of the Word is faithfully wielded in a fallen world!

A Man of Prayer

Prayer is the other primary duty that a minister is called to do. Prayer is a lifeline for any Christian. In prayer men have direct access to God. They enter the Holy of Holies and commune with their Creator and Savior. There is no way for a pastor to remain spiritually strong without praying faithfully and regularly. He must seek guidance and

strength from God because no man is adequate alone, and alone he will be, if he fails to pray.

The minister needs the protection of prayer to shield him from the attacks of the devil. Satan has a lot to gain if he can trip up the leaders of the church. He works overtime in trying to stumble good ministers. Prayer is one of the chief defenses men have against these attacks, because it helps them remember God and His power over all things, i.e. His victory over the devil. In Ephesians 6, Paul commands the fully decked out warrior of the faith to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (vs. 18)

The minister needs to pray for his congregation as a faithful shepherd. Paul is an excellent example here. In most of his epistles, he proclaims his prayers for the church. (Rom 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:7,9; Eph. 1:16-18; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3,9-10; 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 2 Thess. 1:11; Philem. 1:4,6). Prayer is probably the most effective and efficient means available to the pastor in leading and protecting his flock:

The LORD is far from the wicked but He hears the prayer
of the righteous. (Proverbs 15:29)

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
(James 5:16)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears
are attentive to their prayer. (1 Peter 3:12)

Moreover, the minister needs to pray for wisdom to lead the church, because the task is monumental. The apostles ordained deacons, in order to have time to pray (Acts 6:4). Prayer sifts men and sheds light on their hearts and motives. God purifies men in prayer, and He answers their burning questions. He grants men clarity of thought when

they bring their concerns to Him in prayer. Pastors who take on the responsibilities for other men's souls bear a greater burden. Therefore, they have no lack of burning questions or concerns, but consolation is available: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Phil. 4:6)

Pastors are also given the task of praying publicly in worship. All prayer should be biblical, but particularly praying in worship. Fortunately, God has given us a biblical prayer manual in the Psalms. They are an excellent resource for the biblical pastor to glean from as he seeks to grow in his praying.

The offering of corporate prayers is a high and honorable work, and the effective man of prayer will be filled with the Spirit in his prayers. His love for his people is on open display as he intercedes on their behalf. In faithful public prayer, ministers lead the church by example. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matt. 7:7-8) "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matt. 21:22)

A Counselor

Christians are commanded to rebuke and restore those who fall into sin. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:1-2) This is a prophetic duty because it is what the prophets did for the nation of Israel. The pastor is frequently the man called upon to counsel within his church because of his position of authority, his example, and his qualification as a student of the Word. In 2 Timothy 2, Timothy is commanded to

correct those who err, “In humility correcting those who are in opposition.” (vs. 25) Also, in chapter 4, “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” (vs. 2)

Notice that the demeanor of correction is important, i.e. “restore him gently,” “in humility,” and “with all longsuffering and teaching.” A pastoral counselor doesn't lord it over his sheep, he feeds them and makes them lie down beside still waters. In other words, he *loves* them and seeks to help them see their errors from God's perspective.

A minister must be humble, patient, sincere, and wise in order to connect with those he counsels, because usually they are in the grip of some sin, or at the least in the middle of their situation, and unable to see or think clearly concerning their problem. Most people who seek counsel are in need of guidance or advice about some particular problem they are facing, such as marriage, parenting, or fellowship problems. Copious amounts of wisdom are necessary for pastors to succeed in counseling, because sin makes life very, very messy.

Part of that wisdom demands that the counselor must take into consideration the position of those he advises. In Titus, Paul gives specific things for Titus to watch out for in each group of parishioners:

1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the *older men* be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the *older women* likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – 4 that they admonish the *young women* to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that

the word of God may not be blasphemed.

6 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, (Titus 2:1-6)

Not only is the pastor to counsel his flock with an eye toward their particular bents, but he is also required to treat them appropriately for their station in life. “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.” (1Tim. 5:1-2) Practically speaking, this means pastors must exercise wisdom and have adequate safeguards in place to protect themselves and their advisees, particularly women, i.e. a window in the office, meeting in public, accountability, etc.

The faithful pastor must also display a backbone. Paul exhorted Titus, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” (2:15) The honor of the ministerial office is not to be marred by wimpy counseling. The Bible helps on this front.

A godly counselor must be biblical. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction* in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”^{viii} (2Tim. 3:16-17) The pastor must hold “fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Tit. 1:9) Explicit adherence to the Bible will help the counselor communicate that he is not pontificating and experimenting on his clients. It also adds weight to the counsel that a minister gives, and it gives the pastor a firm footing from which to evaluate the client's situation.

One of the reasons that the standards for eligibility to the ministry are so high is

that a pastor must lead by example, “in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.” (Tit. 2:7-8). To counsel, the minister must be above reproach. How can he give guidance to others if his own house is not in order? “First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” (Luke 6:42) Integrity and humility are absolutely necessary virtues for a biblical counselor. Integrity will keep him respectable in the eyes of his church and those he counsels. Humility will keep him looking to God for wisdom, and give him the clarity of vision necessary to fulfill the demands of counseling. The biblical pastor/counselor is a great force for good in the world, but the challenges and dangers of the role are great also.

Christ-like Priest –

As a gracious Christ-like priest, the minister directs the liturgy of the church, serves in the education of the saints, and attends to the needs of those who are suffering.

Leader of Liturgy

God's relationship with mankind has always been covenantal because mankind is defined by worship, *homo adorans*, and worship is covenant renewal. Thus, every time men gather together to worship God, He re-establishes His covenant with them by cleansing them of their sin (confession and absolution), consuming them with the fire of His Word (read and preached), and feeding them (Lord's Supper).^{ix} This pattern was established when God made His covenant with Israel at Sinai. He taught the priests how He was to be worshipped, i.e. with a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a peace offering.

(Lev. 9) We call this pattern liturgy. It is the order, or structure, or dance of worship.

The sacrifices were types of Christ, and were fulfilled in Him. Now, our liturgy in the church reflects the completed work of Christ. The sacrifices of blood have been transformed to spiritual sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, and Christian living. “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)

The first and most obvious priestly duty of a minister is to officiate in the worship service. The ordained pastor is given authority to proclaim the call to worship, absolution for confessed sins, the Word in the sermon, and the benediction at the end of the service. He also has authority to administer the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. When the pastor speaks these things or performs the sacraments, he represents God to the church assembled.

Baptism is the sacrament of entrance into the body of Christ. The blood of Jesus washed away the sins of the world and the church remembers this in the water of baptism. When Jesus commanded baptism in the Great Commission, He said to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:19) Baptism is a naming ceremony, in which the name of God is placed on the baptized, signifying His possession of them. Baptism is performed on acceptance of and belief in the Gospel (our salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ). The water of baptism symbolizes the washing away of sins accomplished by Jesus' blood.

There are differences within the church regarding believers' baptism and paedobaptism. I am paedobaptist. The continuity of the covenant between the Old Testament

and New Testament is strong, and I view baptism as corresponding to circumcision in Israel. They both signify membership within the covenant communities, circumcision in Israel and baptism in the church. Circumcision was a bloody sign typifying the need for blood to be shed in order for sin to be done away with. Baptism also represents the cleansing from sin accomplished in the blood of Christ, but it is no longer bloody because the blood has already been spilt. Circumcision was performed based on parents' belief in the promises of the covenant, as paedobaptism is.

That said, I respect that faithful and biblical Christians differ on this and I wouldn't have any qualms about ministering in a church that has a baptismal agreement wherein credo and paedobaptists can exercise their faith according to conscience. Actually, I believe that these sorts of agreements further the gospel by not creating division in the church over things that ought not to divide.

The other sacrament in which the pastor officiates as a priest is the Lord's Supper, in which God feeds His people:

53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the

man, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:53-58)

23 The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. (1Cor. 11:23-26)

By faith, Christians eat Jesus in the eucharist. He unites them into one body as the one loaf symbolizes. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (1Cor. 10:16-17)

In the administration of the Lord's Supper, there are also differences within the church. I hold to paedocommunion, but recognize that it is a hot button issue in the Reformed world. Those who argue against it claim that communion is for those who are able to discern the body, and not for children and infants. They demand that a credible profession of faith is necessary before partaking of the Lord's Supper is allowed. Those in favor of paedocommunion see the supper as more familial, and would argue from 1 Corinthians 11:26 (above), that participation is a profession of faith. The grounds for

participation are the same as for their participation at the family dinner table. Children are members of the body of Christ, or why do we baptize them? Again, I'd like to reiterate what I said before, I don't think this difference is a valid reason to break fellowship.

Deference to the federal head of each family is an effective means of working with those of different opinions.

Another area in which churches differ is on the frequency of the sacrament. I think that weekly communion is advisable because of the covenant renewal nature of worship. Everything in the liturgy builds up to communion, and after having been in churches that practice weekly communion, the letdown in churches that don't is almost palpable to me when I worship there.

Feed My Lambs

Another priestly duty of the minister is to teach the people of God. Moses commanded the priests to read the Torah to all the Israelites every seven years,

that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.

(Deut. 31:12-13)

This is accomplished in the church today by instructing the youth and novices about the faith with catechism and new members' classes.

The key to a well-grounded church is a solid education in the things of the Lord.^x In the normal course of things, this means that children need to learn their faith. God has given the responsibility of education to parents. He exhorts parents to raise their children

in the “nurture and admonition of the LORD.” (Eph. 6:4) In particular this falls on fathers as covenant heads. Children are represented by their father, and they are commanded to submit to his authority. “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” (Eph. 6:1) Fathers may delegate their authority to others to teach their children (e.g. homeschooling moms or Christian school teachers), but the father oversees, and answers for the way they turn out, even if he is not in the front of the classroom.

The church is a family too. God is our heavenly Father. The church is our mother, the bride of Christ. God has delegated the authority to teach to His church. Our elders have a duty to shepherd their flock, which includes teaching it. One of the requirements for elders is that they be “able to teach.” (1Tim. 3:3) We also see this in the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:19, 20)^{viii}

Elders are responsible that all the things that Christ has commanded are taught to the church. Parents are responsible to raise their children in the fear of the Lord. Parents should read the Bible in their home, teaching their children to apply the Word to their lives. Elders should support the parents' work and make sure it is being done.

What should our elders and parents be teaching the children? The Reformation has left us with some excellent sources to use for teaching. The Heidelberg Catechism was adopted in the Palatinate in 1563 and has been used ever since to teach the doctrines of the reformed faith. Also, in the 1640's, the Westminster divines wrote the Larger and the Shorter Catechisms to teach the faith to their children.

These catechisms are still useful today for three reasons. First, they are shorthand for the teaching of the Bible. They do not replace the Bible and they are subordinate to

the Bible, but the intentions of the authors of these catechisms was that families and churches would use them to teach Christian children what they believe. Second, they have been used for over 400 years to teach the faith to reformed children, and they ensure a standard of education. Third, catechism teaching is an ideal way for elders and pastors to observe the quality of biblical education in the home.

I think elders and pastors make the best church-school instructors. I've talked to more than one pastor who made the observation that "You never know a family until you have their kids in catechism class." One of the most pastoral activities an pastor can engage in is to teach the children in his church. Jesus told Simon Peter, "Feed My lambs." (John 21:15) Catechism teaching is one of the ways that church leaders can do this. Now, while it is appropriate for elders to teach classes, it is fine for them to delegate authority to faithful and qualified lay teachers.

All reformed Christians should study the catechism somewhere along the way. Church history and denominational distinctives should be taught also. These topics are important to learn in order to have a balanced perspective and a solid foundation. They strengthen Christians in their faith and walk.

Now to address some of the logistical concerns in regard to church-school classes. I object to Sunday school during worship. Worship is the engine that drives the vehicle. Sunday school is polish on the chassis.

There are lots of reasons that churches have less than robust catechism teaching. Some churches claim they are doing fine without classes. Another difficulty is acquiring qualified and motivated instructors. Also, adding one more thing to already busy schedules is a challenge.

Thus, pastors need to preach that children need to learn their faith and parents

need to get their act together. Motivating people to come an hour early to church is tough, but church leaders need to display some chutzpah, and get their people excited. The advantages of a solid ecclesiastical education in youth are immeasurable because “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Heart of a Servant

In the dispensation of the Old Testament, priests served in other capacities than just leading in worship and education. They were the doctors of the land. When an Israelite had any wound or skin disease, they would go to the priests for diagnosis and guidance on what to do about it. (Lev. 13;14)

Also, the priests spent a lot of time on distinguishing between holy and profane, clean and unclean, i.e. the dietary laws, leprosy laws, laws about sacrifices (who can and can't touch or eat them), laws about discharges, clothing, sabbath, and jubilee. All these were regulated by the priesthood. God didn't give all of these laws simply to make sure that the Israelites had a respectable list of dos and don'ts. He desired for them to be able to live *well*. These laws were meant to enable Israelites to excel in a fallen world. They were to remind them that they were a special people and qualify them for the blessing of God, which would make them the envy of every nation. (Deut. 28)

Of course, the nation of Israel failed to obey and became subject to exile and the other curses of the covenant. (Deut. 28) Even after the return to the promised land, the scribes and Pharisees turned these laws for life into a system of oppression, as we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan,^{xi} the Lord's rebuke of the Pharisees regarding corban and caring for parents,^{xii} and in the woes He pronounces on them.^{xiii}

When Jesus came, He cleansed the unclean and made the broken whole. “The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor

have the gospel preached to them.” (Luke 7:22) Jesus healed the sick and the blind and the mute and the demon-possessed, even on the Sabbath!^{xiv} He rejected the false applications of the Pharisees and gave the laws their true interpretation, love.^{xv} Jesus was frequently tired and weary, still He expended much energy in serving the needs of the multitudes because He had compassion on them. His love was effectual and it accomplished the aims of the law: freedom from sin, suffering, blindness, sickness, and ultimately death.

Jesus was the true High Priest. He bore all of our infirmities on the cross, to cleanse us, make us whole, and unite us to Himself and the Father. He is a true Advocate for us. He humbled Himself and experienced weakness, so that He could have compassion on us.^{xvi}

What this means for the minister of the gospel is that he is always on call. When the end of life draws nigh, or a family man loses his job, or a wife has cancer, the pastor ought to visit the sick and the needy, comfort the disconsolate, and weep with those who weep.^{xvii} As a representative of Jesus Christ, a minister must be compassionate and love his flock, tending to their peculiar needs. Those who are under his care need to know that he will be there when they need a spiritual advisor and a friend in their time of need. The pastor is not a medical doctor, he is a physician of the spirit and soul.

In a very real sense this is where the rubber hits the road. Pastors must practice what they preach, and they must preach love. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)

Fatherly King –

As a loving Fatherly king, the minister (along with his elders) practices church discipline, guides the direction or shape the church takes, and takes responsibility for the

state of the church.

Protector of the Peace

The minister, along with his elders, must practice church discipline, because it is one of the marks of the true church:

“The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.”

(Belgic Confession, art. 29, para. 3)

Elders are commanded to rule well in the New Testament (1Tim. 3:4,5; Tit. 1:9; 1Pet. 5:1-4), and the Bible also infers this when it commands church members to submit to their elders (1Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). Also, Paul tells Christians to bring their disputes before wise men from the church, rather than to the secular judges:

4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (1Cor. 6:4-5)

Jesus told Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 16:19) A week or so later, Jesus delivered the classic passage on fraternal

disputes within the church:

“15 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:15-20)

In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that the keys of the kingdom belong to the church, and not just to Peter. (vs. 17-18) So, the session of the church *must* practice church discipline to be faithful to the commands and expectations of Scripture.

The next thing we must see is that church discipline has to be explicitly biblical. This is because we maintain a high view of Scripture. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), the books of the Bible “are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.” (WCF ch.I, para. II) As a “rule of faith and life,” the Bible is

authoritative and contains everything that pastor and elders will find necessary to rule the church well. “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (WCF ch. I, para. VI)

The Wisdom of Solomon

“A greater than Solomon is here.”^{xviii} As we've seen, God tasks elders with ruling His church. There are many aspects of this that require great amounts of wisdom on their part: directing the shape of liturgy, education, family cultures, and thinking strategically about church plants, missions, and other ministries.

Liturgy is probably the most vital of these, because worship is so central to the work of the church. Questions about worship structure, music, postures, and dress need to be asked and answered. In all of these, the first thing we need to do is see what the Bible has to say about it. The regulative principle of worship states that “only those elements that are instituted or appointed by command, precept, or example in [the Bible,] or by good and necessary consequence from the Bible are permissible in worship.”^{xix} The Bible, however, while it has many guidelines (as alluded to above), leaves some things up to the wisdom of the elders in determining what the best choice is concerning liturgy. Thus, we see variances in churches within our denomination, i.e. presentation of tithe before or after the sermon, robes or suits worn by pastors, kneeling or not, etc. However, we also see much consistency in worship, i.e. covenant renewal structure, psalm and hymn singing, prayers, Lord's Supper, etc.

Patience and deliberateness are very wise when steering liturgy, because first, God

takes us where we're at, and second, people are creatures of habit. Churches, like people, have histories. Wise leaders of a church do well to consider their church's background before changing things up too much. This is because kneeling, robes, hand-raising, and holy kisses have different connotations depending on context. That said, elders should still be leading the church to be as close to what they believe the Bible teaches as possible.

Cultural aspects of the church (family, education, medicine, diet, etc.) vary as much as the people who walk through the doors, but they exist in every church. The minister and elders need to keep their finger on the pulse of these in order to rule wisely, because the Gospel is cultural and should be bearing good fruit in the church culture. If it is not, it is time for the leaders to do some pastoral spadework.

Strategic thinking about ministry is extremely valuable and sadly non-existent in many churches. It can be the difference between successful vibrant growth or wasted effort and resources.^{xx} Pastors and elders need to consider their communities, their resources, their church's needs, and their capabilities as they evaluate their situation. However, strategic thinking does not replace faith. Jesus is reigning and reigning through men. He will spread His kingdom either through or despite all their strategies. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Lk. 12:33)

The Buck Stops Here

Elders are covenant heads of their churches. Pastors are responsible for the state of the flock under their care. Paul informs us that rulers “must give account”^{xxi} for their leadership, and James warns us that teachers “shall receive a stricter judgment.”^{xxii} Paul also tells us that sinning elders are to be rebuked publicly. “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” (1 Tim 5:20) These texts show that elders

are accountable for how they rule, and they show us how to deal with sin in the leadership.

Let us be wise builders of the church, building on the foundation, and not with perishable materials:

“9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. ” (1 Cor 3:)

Various Considerations -

The Trinity

As the structure of this paper should indicate, I am a Trinitarian Christian. I think this is important to mention, because it is so central to what and who God is and what and who we are. Many churches tend to emphasize one person or another of the Trinity,

and end up being lopsided as a result. For example, Charismatic churches emphasize the Spirit, and thus they tend to be weak on structure and piety, but strong on passion. Hyper-Calvinists emphasize the Father, and are strong on structure, election, and sovereignty, but weak on love and life. And revivalistic churches emphasize the Son, and are strong on love, but weak on assurance and structure. Also, just about all heresies are the result of some misunderstanding of the nature and persons of the Trinity.

16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17)

Church Offices

I hold to the three-office view of church government. Ministers, elders, and deacons are the three offices. This is largely due to the continuity I see between the Old and New Testaments. The lines aren't totally clean, but I see deacons as priests, elders as kings, and ministers as prophets. There is obvious overlap (as my paper's outline suggests), but there it is.

Confirmation of Baptism

I think Confirmation or Profession of Faith as a ceremony in the church is a good idea. For a fuller explanation, see my position paper on this topic.

Fasting and Feasting (Sabbath)

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. 17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matt. 9:14-17)^{xxiii}

Fasting is a spiritual discipline. It is a very tangible way of reminding ourselves that man does not live by bread alone.^{xxiv} Our Lord fasted,^{xxv} the apostles fasted (vs. 15b), Paul fasted,^{xxvi} and Christians have fasted ever since. Fasting is frequently paired with prayer, and is credited with aiding in piety,^{xxvii} casting out demons,^{xxviii} and determining the will of God.^{xxix} Christians today, specifically ministers and elders, would do well to fast periodically, especially when challenged with difficulties and hard decisions.

That said, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” (vs. 15) Not very well. Jesus has promised to be with us always in the Great Commission. He has ordained feast days for us, particularly the Sabbath which comes around every week, and we are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. We should dress up, be merry, and eat and drink our fill of the Lord's bounty. Our feasting is to be

as sincere as our fasting.

The Laborers are Few

I leave you with this passage.

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matt. 9:35-38)

- i WSC Q&A 1.
- ii Rev. 1:6; Rev. 5:10.
- iii This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. (1 Tim. 3:1)
- iv All quotations are from the NKJV Bible.
- v This grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph. 3:8)
- vi Spurgeon, C.H., Lectures To My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of The Pastor's College, Metropolitan Tabernacle, First Series, (London: PASSMORE AND ALABASTER, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS; 1875) pg. vi (Introduction).
- vii IBID, pg. 8.
- viii Emphasis Added.
- ix For a fuller explanation of this, see Jeffrey J. Meyers' The Lord's Service.
- x The remainder of this section is adapted from a position paper I wrote for Greyfriar's on catechism teaching.
- xi Luke 10:25-37.
- xii Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23.
- xiii Matt. 23:1-36.
- xiv Matt. 12:10-13; Luke 6:6-10.
- xv Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-33.
- xvi Heb. 4:15-16; 5:1-8.
- xvii Rom. 12:15.
- xviii Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31.
- xix http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulative_principle_of_worship 8/7/2010.
- xx I recommend Jim Wilson's Principles of War, A Handbook on Strategic Evangelism as an introduction to the concept. It is available for free online at <http://www.ccmbooks.org/pdf/principlesOfWar.pdf> 8/7/2010.
- xxi Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)
- xxii James 3:1.
- xxiii Parallel passages: Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39.
- xxiv Matt. 4:4.
- xxv Matt. 4:2.
- xxvi 2Cor. 6:5; 11:27.
- xxvii Luke 2:37.
- xxviii Matt. 17:21.
- xxix Acts 14:23.