

Reforming the Evangelical Pulpit

John 21

September 25, 2021

You know, I'm, I'm grateful to be here. Travis asked me to speak this morning on the topic of reforming the evangelical pulpit. And so we're going to take a look at preaching and the preacher, more particularly here this morning. I thought Travis did a, just an outstanding job of showing the need for a conference like this. And his opening remarks on the drift into the outer depths of the sea of what passes for evangelicalism today. Honestly, I don't recognize it as something that I belong to.

You know, the evangelical culture, the evangelical machine is not something that I identify with. I was telling Travis before the conference I fully realize that the men that he mentioned last night are not going to be listening to my message this morning. And responding to it. I told him, I said, "That's okay because you know what? I'm not listening to them either." The

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past 40 years have been hard on the evangelical pulpit. In no particular order, we've become accustomed to prosperity preachers and those who claim to have miraculous gifts of healing. We've had political preachers on the left and on the right. We've had cussing pastors and we've had sex-obsessed pastors. We have pastors that use humor and platform gimmicks and ah, expensive stage lighting in order to condition their audiences to receive what they have to say.

It is, it is common for seminaries to train men in preaching by telling them to use personal stories and personal illustrations in order to make their point and to connect with their audience. More recently, of course, as was mentioned last night, the Southern Baptist Convention elevated a known and convicted plagiarist to be their convention president. Now I think that is a far greater crisis, as much as attention as that has received, I think it's a far greater crisis than anything going in the world today. Because when you count the number of seminaries that are under the SBC umbrella and the fact that none of their presidents condemned Ed Litton for, for his plagiarism, the fact that their executive committee has refused to take any kind of

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action to remove him from his post. Instead, they have buttressed and defended him.

Well just think about what that means for the hundreds of men that are coming up in training under, in SBC seminaries. They, they have an academic code that would dismiss them for plagiarism. And yet, they have a president who is, who is a known plagiarist. And what kind of message does that send to those students? It tells them that is okay. It tells them that they do not need to do their own work for the pulpit. They can pay somebody or have, you know, they can hire out their messages and, and do whatever else they want to do and still be fit and qualified for, for ministry.

And the ripple effect of that is, is going to last for decades. And it, it is, it is a very serious crisis and if I were a student in a Southern Baptist Seminary, I would be thinking very seriously about withdrawing and finding my training somewhere else. Because not only is the president like that, but there has been no loud voice of anyone in convention leadership or in seminary leadership who has called for his resignation. That

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means that they accept it. They acquiesce to it, if nothing else, by their silence.

And this is going to have an even more damaging effect long term on the, the evangelical pulpit than any of the other things that we've mentioned because these were men we thought were our friends and thought were likeminded. And the dilution that will take place is, is something that's going to take many, many decades to recover from if this goes the course that it seems to have taken.

So this is what's happened over the last 40 days, so to speak, in the last 40 years in the evangelical pulpit. It's a very serious problem. And the question is that that we want to just address here this morning is how do we go about reclaiming that? How, how can we reform that? And the truth of the matter is, is that you and I, we can't reform that. We can't impose reformation on unwilling men. But we can understand what it is supposed to be like. And we can aim our own hearts, our own pulpits, our own congregations, our own pastors, we can aim after the right and biblical model.

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And as Phil said last night as he was talking about the nature and simplicity of the Gospel, what we need and, and what we must aim for is quite simple, actually. It is not difficult in terms of what the Bible has to say about things. But in order to set the stage, let's think about it this way. To step back and ask the question, is, is it really that bad? Is it as bad as Travis said last night as he pointed out seven, seven a, areas of evangelical drift? Is it as bad as I've framed things here this morning?

Well, you know, we need to step back and soberly consider our environment in light of what Scripture says. And what Scripture says and what Scripture does is it warns us repeatedly about the danger of false prophets and of false teachers. There is no excuse whatsoever for a Bible-believing Christian to read Scripture and not realize that we are living in a dangerous environment. And to assess it properly and to assess it soberly. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7 verse 15, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

And the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 1 said, "False prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you." And the Apostle John in his first letter chapter 4 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

And so we step back and look at the way they opening night was framed and the things that we heard from Travis, and you know, we're not talking about genuine evangelicals here. We're talking about a situation where people wearing the sheep's wool of evangelical garb have entered in, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. And it explains so much to view the situation from that perspective, rather than simply thinking that these are all just wandering brethren who just need a little tap on the shoulder to get them going a different direction.

No, most of them need to be born again. They act this way. They teach this way. They minister this way because they are unregenerate. That is the problem. And so we just want to take

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this seriously and in light of things that Scripture says, in light of what we've seen, it just seems to me like it's time to recognize that these are not even brethren that we are talking about. And the question becomes then not what they should do, but what we should do as a believing remnant under the broader evangelical umbrella.

Well what I would do is encourage us here today and recommit myself for whatever the remaining years that the Lord has given me. You know, I've got 60 years in the rearview mirror, and you know, do the math. There's a lot less in the windshield than there is behind me. And so I'm preaching to myself as much as anything here this morning as I share these things with you. And I would invite you to turn to the Gospel of John chapter 21. The Gospel of John chapter of 21.

As we look at that occasion in which the Lord Jesus Christ restored Peter to ministry after his resurrection. You remember the story very well. We don't need to even look at it in the text. On the night that Christ was crucified, Peter denied him three times. And now, after his resurrection, Jesus is going to

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restore Peter with a threefold confession and send Peter out into ministry. And giving Peter explicit directions on what it is he is to do in ministry. As we're going to see as we look at other Scriptures alongside this passage, we're going to see that this is the same kind of commission that belongs to us today.

What Jesus said to Peter is what he says to men holding an evangelical pulpit today. This is what we are to do. And it's all set forth in a spirit of grace and forgiveness that the Lord extends to Peter after Peter failed him so badly, so, so recently when this text takes place. Let's read these three verses, verses 15 and 17 together. The scriptures say this, "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my lambs.'

"He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Shepherd my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved

because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'" Now let me just make a preliminary comment about the manner in which I'm approaching this text.

Many of you will be familiar with the view that explains this text based on a distinction between two Greek words for love, when which Jesus addresses his questions to Peter. The Greek verbs for love, *agapao*, and a close synonym, *phileo*. And the passage is, is explained by the fact that Jesus asks Peter the first two times, "Do you *agapao* me?" Peter says, "Yes, Lord, I *phileo* you." The idea being that *agapao* is a type of total commitment whereas *phileo* is a idea of more personal affection kind of thing. And so it's explained on the basis of that distinction.

And then on the third time, Jesus uses *phileo* to ask Peter whether he loves him or not. And Peter is supposedly grieved because Jesus asked him whether he even had affection for him rather than total commitment. Well, for many reasons that I

won't explain today, I am not going to explain the passage from that perspective. I just want to acknowledge the issue so that those of you who have heard that understand that I am approaching the passage from a different perspective, and you're not left wondering why I didn't give you the right interpretation to begin with.

Well, there's a reason for that. There's a different, and I believe better way to understand the passage. But that difference with teachers that I respect is secondary to today's topic and it would unnecessarily complicate our time together if I went into a long extended discussion of that particular issue. We're going to look at this passage from the perspective that Jesus is asking Peter the same question three times.

Part of the reason that we're, that we take that position is because it's what the text says. Jesus asked him the first time, verse 16; he asked him the second time, verse 17; he asked him the third time, "Simon, do you love me?" If the third question was intended to be greatly different from the first two, it would, he would have, you couldn't say he was asking it a third

time. It would be the first time that he was asking that question.

And so there's a lot of reasons to look at the passage from a different perspective. So, I'm aware of that issue, but that is not our topic for today. If any of you are interested in the reasons, the six different reasons that I look at the passage differently, you can approach me, and I'd be happy to share that with you via an email link at some time in the future.

For today, what we're looking at here is this. We remember the historical context. Peter had denied Jesus three times and he had denied him publicly and he denied him with oaths. So it was a very serious betrayal that Peter had done. There was a very serious straying that had taken place. Just as the evangelical pulpit today has strayed and denied Christ in similar ways, just with a little bit more sophistication than the fisherman did.

Jesus comes to Peter in order to restore him, to restore him publicly, to restore him in front of the other disciples. And so he walks him through a threefold affirmation of this love. And

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then instructs Peter on what he is to do in response to that love. Peter now is confessing Christ, not denying him. And the threefold confession Jesus uses as a basis to set him on the path for future ministry. And that is the same path that we are to follow ourselves.

If there were ever to be an evangelical repentance for the current state of the evangelical pulpit, the fruit of repentance would look like this. The fruit of repentance would be men embracing the four principles that we're going to talk about today and repenting and forsaking all of the things that have marked the drift that has taken place over the past 40 or 50 years.

And so what does Christ require from men in the pulpit? What does Christ require from those who would name his name, who would open his Word, who would teach, who would lead a congregation? What would he require from them? We're going to see four principles here in this text. And the first one is this is that he must be a man of Christ. He must be a man of Christ.

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The three questions that Jesus asks Peter allows him to repent of his prior denials. And notice, notice the way that it is phrased, the words of Christ to Peter. He says in verse 15, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Verse 16, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Verse 17, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He is clarifying and drawing out of Peter's heart, Peter what is the supreme object of your affection? What is your response to me, the risen Lord?

And so Christ puts himself at the center of the issue and calls for Peter to acknowledge love and commitment to Christ before he's able to be sent out into ministry. And that principle of love for Christ exclusively is the mark of the commitment of any true disciple of Jesus Christ. And it is to be an exclusive devotion where there is no competitors for our innermost affections to compete with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look back at Matthew chapter 10 with me. In words that do not need to be watered down. Matthew chapter 10 verse 37. This is simply what Christ requires of a true disciple. If you don't love Christ a, at the utmost, you don't belong to him. And so in

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Matthew chapter 10 verse 37, Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me."

To be a disciple of Christ is to love him preeminently above all else and to have that clear as a principle in your mind even if you stumble and don't live in perfect accordance with the principle. You recognize the principle in your heart. You embrace it. And that is the mark of a true Christian. And therefore, all the more is it to be the mark of a man stepping into an evangelical pulpit. He understands who Christ is and he loves him supremely. He loves him to the point of sacrificing himself. He loves him to the point of obeying Christ no matter what the cost may be.

Jesus made this clear in the Gospel of John, earlier in the Gospel that we're taking our text from. In John 14:15, he said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Verse 21 of chapter 14, "He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me." John 15 verse 14. "You are my friends if you

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do what I command you." And so there's this clarifying, penetrating question that comes to Peter. Peter, where is the supreme affection of your heart? What do you think about me? Do you love me like this?

And Peter says, "Yes, Lord, I do." "Yes, Lord, I do." "Yes, Lord, I do." He says it three times. And so the preeminent qualification for a man to carry an evangelical pulpit is that he be a genuine true Christian. I mean it, it is a sad reflection of the state of things that that point even needs to be made. But in a day like ours, but Jesus makes it with Peter. And we see Jesus putting himself as the central issue that Peter needs to consider.

And so a man in the pulpit, a man with an ongoing teaching ministry must be a man of Christ, a man that is personally devoted to him, not simply theological accuracy, not simply engaging personal relationship in the course of pastoral ministry. Those things are important. They have a place. But the preeminent cornerstone is a man who loves Christ enough to obey him, enough to love Christ in order to put the interests of

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Christ ahead of his own self-interest. To risk and surrender the possibility of even his own freedom and his own popularity, to be willing to risk all of that for the greater sake of Christ. That is the first thing that we see out of this passage.

The solitary motive. The preeminent motive for being in a pulpit must be a personal love for Christ that excludes all others.

There must be a sharp clear recognition of the lordship of Christ that his Word belongs to him. Therefore, a pulpit belongs to him and that we're just servants delivering something to his people. That we are nothing in ourselves. There is nothing in ourselves of any merit. There is this pure and utter and exclusive devotion to Christ.

And so for a modern reformation to take place, for those of us who separate ourselves from the current evangelical sewage that is flowing through so much, for those of us that separate from it, we must recognize these things. And if there's to be repentance from others, they must repent of their desire for fame. They must repent of their desire for fortune. They must

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repent of their desire for a following and counting their Twitter followers and things of this nature.

And repent of their desire for applause from unsaved men in the secular arena. They must repent of all of that. They must repent of all of those false motives and come back to Christ and humbly, with Peter, confess their failures and say, Lord, yes, I do love you. I know that my prior life has not shown it. I understand that my prior ministry has reflected me not you. But, Lord, I repent of that.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." In 2 Corinthians he said, "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake." I ask you the question, how can a man possibly preach Christ if he does not love Christ preeminently? How can a man who does not love Christ preeminently preach Christ and call others to love him preeminently? The hypocrisy is bound to undermine any blessing of the Lord on his ministry.

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Perhaps, just perhaps reformation would come if these pastors would seriously step back and ask themselves why they even have a platform. What is the purpose of it? Do they, do they fear God or not? Do they fear the fact that they will face a stricter judgment at the end of their ministry? That they will stand before Christ and bear a stricter judgment, James 3:1.

Do they fear God or not? Because it's hard to reconcile the humor and the sex obsession and the cursing and all of the other things that I mentioned earlier. It's not just hard, it's impossible to recognize that manner of ministry with a man who genuinely fears God, who genuinely loves Christ supremely. A man who genuinely loves Christ will be marked by his sobriety and a seriousness to his ministry that is fitting with the high calling that's been given to him. And the platform that has been given to him.

If that is missing, if you don't somehow detect something of the fear of God and the love of Christ in a man, there is reason to just get up and leave. Walk out. Don't even wait for the sermon to finish and certainly, don't stay in a church that is like

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that. What Peter did in response to these questions was he looked back at his denials, and he rectified them. The Lord gave him opportunity to rectify them by confessing three times that he did in fact love Christ. And did it publicly in a way that others could see and embrace.

And so that moment clarified his motive for future service. And the grief that Peter expressed is not over a difference in a verb form that is used. But rather grief over the recognition that the third time just brought his mind freshly back to that third time that he denied this risen Lord with curses and of course his heart was broken. It pained him to remember what he had so recently done. But the Lord in his grace, the Lord in his mercy brings Peter back into ministry and restores him.

You know what? The Lord would do the same for some of these recalcitrant pastors now if they would come in the like-minded and like-humility of Peter and repent of it all. The Lord is gracious and forgiving. But this current path that we're on is obviously contrary to being a man of Christ. And it is endemic in Christian ministry today with far too few exceptions.

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So he must be a man of Christ. Well, point number two. What else does Christ point Peter to? What does Christ, he, point us to in this encounter with Peter? We see point number two that the man must not only be a man of Christ, he must be a man of the canon. C-A-N-O-N. A man of the book of God. A man of the Word of God. As Jesus restores Peter, he points him to the content of what Peter is to do. He points him to what Peter is to focus on now going forward.

Peter, now that it's been established that you love me, here's what I want you to do. And so look there in verse 15 with me again. He says, "Simon, do you love me more than these?" He said, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus gives him a command in response to that love. He says, "You tend my lamb." English Standard Version, "Feed my lambs."

Verse 16, "Simon, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said, "Shepherd my sheep." Verse 17, "Do you love me?" Peter said to him, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." And so

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using the New American Standard translation here, "Tend my sheep," "Shepherd them," "Tend them." Peter, I have a people. The Lord has a people that belongs to him. And they need men to lead them, to feed them, to care for them. And the idea that Jesus is imposing upon Peter is, your responsibility is to take my people, have them in mind and you are to do something with them. You are to tend them and take care of them.

Well, what is it that a pastor has to feed people? I mean, we're talking in metaphors here. They're not literal sheep and it's not literal food that we're talking about. What is it that they are to do? Well the verb tenses in the Greek show that this is an ongoing responsibility that is to be done. And obviously, lambs and sheep, they need to be fed if they are to grow and to be healthy. They need to be taken care of.

And the food for the flock of the God is the Word of God. The food for the flock of Christ is the Word of God. Jesus is telling Peter, I want you to go and feed my people. We can see how Peter understood this. We can see exactly what Jesus meant

by this when we examine the subsequent course of Peter's life and ministry. What was it that Peter did?

Well, when the occasion came up in Acts chapter 6 and there were men needed to feed the widows that were not being taken care of, they said, "We cannot forsake the word of God and prayer for the sake of tending the tables." The Word of God and prayer is our priority. As you read through his ministry in the book of Acts, what is it that he's preaching? He's preaching Scripture. He is not preaching to people and telling them how to have a better sex life. He is not preaching and telling them how to find material prosperity.

He is telling them how to find forgiveness of sins. Acts 4:12, "There is no one under heaven, of, no one else under heaven given among men by whom we must be saved." Loose paraphrase there. He is preaching Scripture. He is preaching Christ. And in his letters, Peter calls believers to the Word of God. He said in 1 Peter chapter 2, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow and respect the salvation."

Chapter 4, "Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God." 2 Peter chapter 1, "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." In 2 Peter chapter 3, he says, "You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your Apostles." It's the Word of God. It's the Word of God. It's the Word of God.

Peter took that instruction about "tend my sheep," and he went out and spent the rest of his life preaching the Word of God in his ministry. And so a man who would serve Christ in an evangelical pulpit is to be a man who is exclusively about the Scriptures. The evangelical pulpit feeds people the Word of God.

It is not an entertainment venue. This is not a comedy club. It is not a psychologist's couch that we engage in when we come up here. This is not a political rally on the left or on the right. The Word of God, the teaching of the Word of God is to be

preached. And Scripture could not be more clear about this. Jesus' instructions, his commission to the church was utterly clear on this.

He said at the end of Matthew 28. He said, "Go and make disciples, teaching them all that I commanded you." As Phil alluded to in Luke 24, at the end of that Gospel, repentance for the forgiveness of sins shall be proclaimed to all of the nations. Look at 2 Timothy chapter 3 with me and what you find if you were to trace this out in the progress of revelation from the time of Christ through the ministry of the Apostles to the close of the Apostolic age if you were to trace it out chronologically through the progress of revelation you would find this point being made from the beginning to the end.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3. I know it's a familiar passage, but we need to see it again, especially in this context. In verse 15, Paul tells Timothy that "from childhood you have known the sacred writing, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for

reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate equipped for every good work.”

And then there's not a chapter break in the original. Those didn't come until centuries later. Immediately after that, there is no break in thought here at all. Paul therefore says to Timothy in chapter 4, verse 1. “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing in his kingdom,” what?

“Preach the word: be ready in season and out of season: reproof, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

He sets forth the sufficiency of the Word for evangelism. He sets forth the sufficiency of the Word for edification and then he invokes the presence of God. He invokes the presence of Christ. He invokes future judgment upon Timothy for his response to this information, to this exhortation. He says, “Timothy in light of all these things, here's what you're to do.” Three words in English, “Preach the Word. Timothy, you are to be a man of the canon. You are to be a man of the Word.”

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Because it is the Word that sanctifies the saints. It's the Word that equips us. It is the Word, it is through believing in the Word, it is the preached Word that brings sinners to Christ. That is our mission. That is what our Lord is after. This is the building up of the Lord's kingdom. And we are not to misappropriate the platform and the authority of the Word of God. To misappropriate this for everything that is passing for evangelicalism in, in the modern approach to this.

It is, it is a terrible travesty and I legitimately fear for these men, of the accountability that is going to be theirs before the throne of a holy God. Having stood up in his name and done something other than preach the Word. I can't imagine what's going to happen to them. It is frightening to contemplate.

Now, let's just take a little practical look at it. Let's take a little breath here. And just take a practical look, wh, how can you know if the man's really preaching the Word or not.

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You know, that might seem like the simple question, but it's, it's not that easy, is it? Because all of these men of whom we were talking about will throw in a Bible verse here or there to justify what they're saying. The question is how can you recognize a man of God who is genuinely a man of the canon?

It's not simply that he alludes to the Bible in the course of an unrelated discourse. That's not it. That's not being a man of the canon. The question is, what are the doctrines that mark that man's ministry? What does he teach? What is the substance that he communicates? And so I think that there are, you know, that there are easily seven questions, more that you could ask to determine whether a man was a man of God, a man of the canon or not?

And by which false teachers could look at themselves. If they would ever look at themselves honestly. And say, Is this true of my ministry or not? Let me just run through these real quickly. They're in somewhat of an order. Not exhaustive, but representative. When does, when does this man teach you about the inerrancy, the authority, and the sufficiency of Scripture?

When does he do that? When has he done that in the course of his ministry? What sermons, what books, what passages, what articles can you look to where he has set forth and defended the inerrancy of Scripture? If he's been in ministry any time at all, that ought to be pretty prominent in something that he has said from the outset.

Here's another question: When does this man speak to you about the holiness and the wrath of God? When does this man speak to you about eternal judgment? And hell? When does he speak to you about sin and repentance? When has he articulated those doctrines? When has he warned sinners that things are not all well, that Jesus might have a different plan for you than just making you feel good and fixing your problems? That possibly Jesus has a plan for you that involves eternal damnation for your rebellion and godlessness against him? When does he warn people about that?

How can a man stand on a platform in front of people that are obviously unregenerate and not have that come out of his mouth? If he's a genuine man of God and is genuinely concerned for the

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souls of these people, how can he not speak about these things? I ask you, if he understands them, how can you not speak of them? How can he hide that information? How could the doctor hide a diagnosis of terminal, but treatable cancer from his patient and just say, You know what, you're fine. You're healthy. Go and be in peace. But doctor, I've got this eight pound thing hanging out of my side? It's okay, no worries.

When does this man speak to you about the doctrine of justification by faith alone? When does he sp, talk about reconciliation with God? When does he talk about redemption? When does he speak about the person and work of Christ? When does he talk about the substitutionary atonement? When does he speak about sanctification? I know I've kind of blended a lot of question together there. In general, there's seven, but you can sort that out later as you try to.

I don't know. I came up with like 12, Martha. What did you come up with? He said there were seven. You get the idea. When are these biblical doctrines set forth in his ministry? You know, and we're not talking about a guy who maybe occasionally teaches

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a Sunday School class to help out in a local church. We're not talking about men who are teaching in in subsidiary roles, like that, secondary roles. And they don't have a lot of opportunity. They should still be talking about these things. But these are not the men that I have in, in the crosshairs of what I'm saying here.

We're talking about men that were introduces last night. Men that have a platform. Men that have a following. Men that teach for their living. The question is what are they teaching? They, the content of what they are teaching shows us whether they are a man of the canon or not. And for these, I'd say it with grief in my hear with these, for these men we thought were our friends who are now teaching social justice and white privilege and all of these things. And have strayed from these things. I can't explain that.

I can only appeal to them to come back to your first love. Come back before the Lord spits you out for straying like this. Is this what's been in your heart all along, and only now that there's the opportunity for greater popularity and acceptance by

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the world? Tell me how it is, tell me how it is, I'd speak to an imaginary man who's not so imaginary. Tell me how it is that you can march with Black Lives Matters, and yet stand aloof from John MacArthur when he's standing up for the right of the church to meet and worship as God has commanded?

And you can, you can diminish John and marginalize him with the things that you say publicly, and you won't stand with him. But you will gladly go out and, and march with the people of Black Lives Matters, who, until they took it down from their website, had posted as their reason for existence a completely anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-biblical agenda? Tell me how you can do that and still claim to be a man of the canon? Tell me! I'd like to know!

These are the themes of the canon. These men have been given a platform in order to exposit these things and let the world come and go as it may. Their silence on such issues is deafening. If a man does not speak about these issues, but instead prefers to tell you stories about his children and his grandchildren, and what he did on his latest vacation, and that's the mark of what

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he says, that's the pattern of what he says, beloved, he's not a man of the canon. I don't care how big his church is. I don't care what his denominational affiliation is. He's not a man of the canon.

And in light of everything that Scripture says about warning us against Paul's prophets, there will be many of them, we should not trifle with this and assume that it's okay. These guys, we have got to stop giving them the benefit of the doubt. And say, "No, I'm gonna hold closer to Scripture and if I'm wrong about this, it'll be, I'll be wrong because I was taking Scripture too seriously, rather than not seriously enough. I'll err on the side of caution. I'll err on the side of fidelity rather than on carelessness for me and my family and for my church.

Speaking of church, that brings us to our third point. He must be a man of the church. Jesus said, "Feed them, feed them, feed them." Who are the they? What's the antecedent of the pronoun here? Well go back to John chapter 21. I don't know if you can tell, I'm kind of fired up about these things. I'm glad to have the opportunity to let this out. I've been wanting an

opportunity to say these things. Now you guys get to deal with it and I can move on to something else.

What's the focus? Who is it that Jesus entrusts to Peter in the ap, apostolic circle and those of us that follow in their biblical steps? Verse 15, "Peter, tend my lambs." Verse 16, "Shepherd my sheep." Verse 17, "Tend my sheep." Beloved, a true pastor, the true evangelical pulpit is given for the sake of the church, not the community. It's given for the sake of the people of God, not preeminently. First among, this may surprise some of you to hear me say this, not first and foremost to the lost. Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep, not the goats.

The true evangelical pulpit, the pulpit that rests within a local church has as its first goal to edify and feed the sheep of God. The pastor is called to the church, not to the community. Look over at Ephesians chapter 4. And I know that those of you that are at Grace Church of Greeley, you've had this passage pointed out to you on multiple occasions, a fact for which you should give thanks to God.

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In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, Paul is explaining the gifts that the risen Christ has given to the church for its benefit. Christ not only, not only died a substitutionary death for our sins, he not only rose for our justification, he not only ascended into heaven in order to intercede for us before the Father, he also appointed men to be a blessing to the church and to provide a physical presence and a physical care in his physical absence. Men who would represent him in his stead while we walk on this earth.

And so in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, our point that we're making here is that the evangelical pulpit is filled by a man who is a man of the church, not a parachurch. Don't get me started on that one or we'll be here all day. Verse 11, "He gave some as Apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers." Why did he do that? For what purpose? What's the object of that gift?

"For the equipping of the saints for the work of the service, to the building up of the body of Christ." His lambs, his sheep.

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the

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knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Over in Colossians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul says, “We proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” He’s referring to the church. He’s referring to those that Christ has saved. He’s referring to his flock. Well what about Peter who received this admonition from the Lord. I’m skipping over other texts for the sake of time.

1 Peter chapter 5 verse 1. Peter says, “I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and are a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but voluntarily.” Verse 3, “Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

Beloved, the purpose of the evangelical pulpit is not to build the widest possible following in the world and to try to have

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some kind of measure of influence on unsaved people who are unregenerate and don't even care about the things of God. The preeminent priority of an evangelical pulpit is to build up people like you. God has given pastors to build you up. And to build you up by teaching you the Word of God, the doctrines of God.

This is what the evangelical pulpit is to do. And we're not even halfway through the conference here and the case has already been made and conclusively established that that is not what is happening in the broader evangelical world today. It sobers us. In one sense it frightens us to realize how far astray things are. And then there's a sense of righteous indignation drawn out of love for God and the fear of God that says, This aint right! This belongs to God. This belongs to Christ. These, this is his Word. These are his people!

And the men who have been entrusted with the opportunity are proving themselves to be faithless shepherds. This is not okay. This is a greater crisis than anything politically happening in the secular world. The purposes of Christ are being betrayed.

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And there ought to be a sense of indignation against that. So repentance would look like men coming back and saying, You know what? Let me delete my Twitter account. Let me delete my Facebook page. Let me withdraw my books from circulation. I need time to just focus on the people who are in front of me and minister to them because I've obviously neglected that.

And with broken, a broken heart and with tears like Peter, saying, Lord, if these men are regenerate for them to say, Lord, you know all things, you know I love you. You know I've failed. I'm canceling the next the conference in order to make a point. And yeah, I know that certain cities in the Midwest will suffer as a result. But Lord, the mo, the first thing for me is to get right vertically with you, to reestablish the purpose for which I was given this platform in the first place.

See, we can't fix this on the margins. We can't fix this by continuing business as usual. This requires a wholesale repentance and a forsaking of things that these men have built their ministries on. There's no other answer. And apart from the Spirit of God, I know that they're not going to do it. But

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perhaps the Spirit would have mercy on us and mercy on them. And open their eyes. As Jesus brought Peter back to repentance, perhaps the Spirit of God would bring these men back to repentance while there's still time. The angels in heaven would rejoice. More "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 who need no repentance." Can't imagine what it would be like if one of these kinds of pastors would repent and return to biblical ministry. I can't imagine the chorus in heaven of rejoicing that would take place if that happened.

Just a little word for people in here, in, within the room here. Just to be mindful, just a gentle encouragement, let's say, for you. You know, there are endless number of evangelical podcasts that you can listen to and video feeds and of that kind of stuff. Be careful what you listen to. You know, be careful about listening to men and letting them form your theology and your worldview if they themselves have not somehow carried a pulpit of their own.

If they're speaking about these things apart from having actually given attention to the systematic teaching of Word of

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God. There's better people for you to follow. Men who are not proven in the church are not men who should have influence in your life. You can listen to Phil. You can listen to Travis. You can listen to John MacArthur. You're going to have plenty to fill your time and to fill your ears with the right kind of things. Men who have given themselves to the church and have done it for decades. These are the men that we need to listen to.

And so it goes both ways. A man of Christ. A man of the canon. A man of the church. Fourthly and finally for this morning, he must be man of character. He must be a man of character. Go back to John chapter 21. John 21 and as I've said already, it'll make it easier if we can go through this a little bit more quickly perhaps. Jesus did not send Peter out for ministry until he addressed the man himself. He addressed Peter before he commissioned him.

And so he says, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Verse 16, "Do you love me?" Verse 17, "Do you love me?" It's a direct personal question to Peter. Peter, forget about all of these

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others? What about you? Who are you? What it, what, what, what marks you? And in his questions, Jesus led Peter out of his former denials into an expression of the heart commitment that was always there.

I love the fact, and John MacArthur points this out so well, that Peter knew at this time. He knew that there was nothing in his life that he could point to that would vindicate his claim to loving Christ. He had just denied it with oaths and cursing. And so there was nothing that Peter could point to as a point of pride to say, Lord, this proves it. Look at what I did.

Peter doesn't appeal to himself and response to that third question he says, "Lord, you know all things." He appeals to the omniscience of Christ. He says, Lord, I know that I'm here before you as a broken failure. I know that I've sinned against you. But Lord, I appeal to your knowledge. You know what's true even if I can't prove it. Lord, you know I love you. Act with me, respond to me, accept me according to what you know to be true, rather than the nature of my life.

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And beloved, that's the way that we all approach Christ. You know? We don't approach him pointing to our works, to our merit. We approach him both in our initial conversion and as we approach him subsequently, Lord, I am relying on your shed blood. I'm relying on your righteousness. I'm relying on the fact that your Father accepts you, not anything in myself. I rely on you. I rely on that which ext, external to me, not on anything that I can point to in my life.

You know, the best truly evangelical men are still pockmarked with failure, aren't they? You know, we're all men of clay. We all have a grace given to us to have a ministry that if the Lord took our sins into account, we would not have the opportunity. And so we appeal outside of ourselves. Lord, I appeal to you. Peter does that. And Jesus is shaping his character as he does. And this whole idea of character is emphasized in 1 Timothy 3, as you know, and in Titus 1, as you know. That a man must be above reproach if he is to be a shepherd of the sheep of God.

He is to be a man of character. And we won't take the time to look at those passages. But when you study them, you'll find as

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you look at those character traits, even in the character traits, you'll find phrases that, that how's he going to take care of the church of God if he can't administer his own household? He needs to be a man of sound doctrine, teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict.

Even the character requirements for elders in those two crucial chapters emphasize the things that we're talking about. He has to be a man of Christ. He has to be a man of the canon. He has to be a man of the church and that this is to be the focus of the elder. As the Bible lays out the character of the pastor, it's emphasizing the priorities that should be placed in his church and in his teaching.

So much so that we believe and teach and understand and affirm that a pastor, a genuine pastor is first and foremost on a horizontal level, his first and primary responsibility is to the sheep, not to the goats. And evangelism takes place as an overflow as the saints are built up, not as the primary first and foremost goal that the pastor has in his, in his heart.

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And so our commitment today, going forward to pulpit reformation includes all four of these traits. The man in the pulpit is to be a man of Christ and a man of the canon and a man of the church and a man of character. This is not a smorgasbord where you chose one or two that you like, and you let the others go. These four are an indivisible unit. They are, they are a single cloth. They all come together. They all must be present. Each one is indispensable and reinforces the other. And I know that Travis and Phil would join with me in what I'm about to say. That this is a high calling of which no man is worthy on his own. It must be a work of God in his life.

Notice, my friends, that these four traits have nothing to say about prominence. They have nothing to say about eloquence. They come from a work of the Holy Spirit in the man. Yesterday, for those of you that weren't there, we had a lunch with the speakers and some area pastors, regional pastors that came in. Men of pastoring churches of small size like Travis and I do. And and so forth.

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And I, one of the things that came out in that discussion my, my genuine conviction is, is that going forward, and I say this to encourage and to set lofty aspirations and affirmation for those of you who are men like that, pastoring in obscurity, pastoring in places that don't get the spotlight. I genuinely believe that the, in the state of things as they exist today, those are precisely the men who are going to be the bulwark and the for, fortress for the truth.

It's not going to be the ones who have the prominence. It's not going to be the ones who are congratulated by men of national recognition. It's going to be these quiet men who are content to be a man of these four traits and just living this out. And as this is done in various areas throughout the country and throughout the world, these are the men that God is going to use to uphold and advance his kingdom. Not the other ones. Not the ones who don't love Christ. Not the ones who don't love the church. Not the ones who don't teach the canon.

They're sound and fury signifying nothing. For those of you that are here and you're li, like me and you're a small church

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pastor, we're together in this. We're genuinely together for the Gospel. And so, as with Peter, as with Paul, as with Martin Luther in the year 1517, our great, great need is for the Lord of the church to act upon men and to raise up shepherds that are after his own heart as expressed in these four traits.

Yes, you and I, men, we must labor and preach according to the strength that is given to us. But in the words of Psalm 127 verse 1, we're gonna labor in vain unless the Lord is the one who is building the house. And so we look to our gracious Lord out of a heartfelt gratitude for the salvation that he has given to us, out of a heartfelt sense of obedience and, and loyalty and integrity.

We say, Lord, this belongs to you. This is not mine. And so let me just be a steward on your behalf. In those things, we commit ourselves and in those things alone will we find the development of a truly evangelical pulpit. But because it is so much beyond us as we do these things, as we become more and more men like that, let us especially pray for the favor of God upon us as we do, that he would protect his church and that he would vindicate

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the true men of God in the end. I know that he will. And I'm grateful to have friends like you that share the passion for these things. Let's pray together.

We beseech you, O Lord, to send workers like these into your harvest. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.