

From The Editor Welcome To TSFJ



by Art Azurdia

editorial: *“characteristic of an editor . . . expressing opinion in the manner of an editor . . . an article in a newspaper or magazine that expresses the opinion of its editor.”*

It seems an amusing quirk of providence that I find myself the editor of *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal*. Amusing, firstly, because I am no scholar. Amusing, secondly, because I have no formal training in the literary arts. Rather, I am a pastor who just happens to be a faculty member of a seminary in the Pacific Northwest—a jewel of theological education that, to the glory of God, is being steadily rediscovered: Western Seminary.

Now, surprisingly cast in the role of editor (owing only, perhaps, to my proclivity for expressing opinions directly . . . if not necessarily softly!), it will be my prerogative to introduce each issue with an article that seeks to call attention to the importance of the respective theme and to subsequently provoke your interest in it. This issue, *our inaugural issue*, seeks to pose a question: “What Is A Pastor?”

Of course, choosing such a theme runs the risk of marginalization as a consequence of an assumed simplicity: “Certainly everybody knows what a pastor is.” However, given the current evangelical scene, there appears to be *nothing* simplistic regarding the identity of a pastor. In fact, many clear-thinking churchmen and theologians are persuaded that the pastoral ministry, as we presently know it, *is in a state of crisis*.

Is this surprising to you? Does it sound a bit extreme or exaggerated? It is not my aim to be sensationalistic. Rather, it is to urge you to thoughtful reflection, given some of the telling observations that presently distinguish our church culture in general, and the pastoral ministry in particular. For example:

- In the United States 1,500 pastors are leaving the gospel ministry every month for reasons other than retirement or death.
- The average pastoral tenure in the United States is less than four years.
- The primary criteria for measuring pastoral success are “bodies, bucks, and buildings,” with the result that the predominant influences shaping pastoral paradigms are the contemporary techniques of the marketplace.
- Postmodernism has cast an inescapable shadow of suspicion on the role of pastoral authority, to the end that fewer men are pursuing positions of definitive leadership.

Serious evangelicals cannot help but be disturbed by these observations. In fact, many of us realize we are already suffering the attendant consequences. Moreover, if the present dilemma of pastoral ministry remains unaddressed we can anticipate only further deterioration in the health of the church and, ultimately, an increasing impotence in our witness to the world.

But should we be filled with despair? Absolutely not. When I ponder the present pastoral crisis and find myself tempted to despondency I return to two resolute convictions:

1) It is a time for optimism. Jesus Christ has conquered death, ascended into heaven, and assumed His place at the Father's right hand ". . . far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put everything under His feet and appointed Him as head over everything for the church" (Eph 1:21). Our Lord, by divine appointment, is the universal Sovereign and the Head of the Church.

Furthermore, as an expression of His redemptive accomplishments, Jesus Christ has poured forth the great promise of the new covenant: the indwelling Holy Spirit. And while we readily affirm the uniqueness of Pentecost—that it has never been repeated—we must live in the awareness that it has never been retracted.

So far from despair, we should be filled with expectancy because we have a victorious Chief Shepherd (*i.e.* Senior Pastor) who, at His own sovereign discretion, will ordain men to the pastoral task (*e.g.* Jn 15:16)—pastors possessed by a God-entranced foundation, a Gospel-saturated message, and a Spirit-endowed courage; and,

2) It is a time for opportunity. Though altogether without need, more often than not it is the good pleasure of the sovereign Lord to accomplish His purposes through human instrumentality. Amazingly, condescendingly, He employs the likes of us with our imperfect gifts, compromised faithfulness, and mixed motivations. Never are our efforts worthy of His blessing; yet, He does bless us by *using* us.

For this reason, then, we must not turn a blind eye to this crisis of pastoral identity. We must seek to rectify it. To allow this pressing need to go unaddressed is to disregard the Lord of the Church, the well-being of the people of God, and the prevailing need of the world around us. Hence, with its various contributions, this issue—"What Is A Pastor?"—now comes to you.

Welcome to the inaugural publication of *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal*. It is my heartfelt prayer that it will encourage, edify, and embolden all of my dear brothers faithfully engaged in this cruciform life we know as the pastoral ministry.