

Preaching as an Act of Soul-Watching:
Why Worship Services Should Include “Listening to a Preacher’s Sermon.”

Randal Emery Pelton
Calvary Bible Church, Mount Joy, PA
Lancaster Bible College Graduate School/Haddon Robinson School of Preaching

Abstract: On Easter Sunday 2007 a church began in Millersville, PA with this purpose: “We’re trying to start up a kind of come-as-you-are place where people have conversations, rather than listen to a preacher’s sermon.” Recent homiletical material (e.g., Pagitt, Anderson) may be diminishing the importance of “listening to a preacher’s sermon.” This paper explores how the concept of soul-watching informs the theology of preaching and argues for the indispensability of listening to a preacher’s sermon.

Introduction

Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 describe the function of a pastor, which includes the task of teaching the Scriptures, in such a way that adds importance to listening to sermons in church. Hebrews 13:17 says that pastors function as soul-watchers. 1 Timothy 4:16 says that pastors save themselves and their congregants through their teaching ministry. I want us to explore the implications of this understanding of the function of a pastor for what appears to be a trend to downplay the need for a pastor’s sermon. I am suggesting that when we think about the preaching event in church, we should place it under the umbrella of soul-watching (using the language of Hebrews 13:17). From this perspective, teaching the Scripture in church serves a larger goal of *watching over the souls* of those entrusted to our care. This larger goal contributes to the indispensability of pastoral preaching.

Homileticians and pastors who are attempting to move away from pastoral preaching in favor of, for instance, Pagitt’s “progressional dialogue,” should consider this theological concept in their discussion (Pagitt, 2005, pages 11-12). In contrast to the carefully crafted sermon, Pagitt’s progressional dialogue “involves the intentional interplay of multiple viewpoints that leads to unexpected and unforeseen ideas....This kind of preaching is dynamic in the sense that the outcome is determined on the spot by the participants” (Pagitt, 2005, p. 52). Let’s look briefly at the two sections of Scripture mentioned above, interact with some recent homiletical material that seems to be diminishing the importance of pastoral preaching in church, and then discuss the implications of these two Scriptures for this trend.

A brief look at Hebrews 13:17

Hebrews 13:17 reads: “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

The instruction in this verse is directed to parishioners. Later in v. 24 they are referred to as “saints” and differentiated from the “leaders.” A cursory reading of this verse reveals that these local church leaders had substantial authority. The recipients of this letter were instructed to *obey* them and *submit* to them. We know from v. 7 that these leaders were teaching the Word of God, so it was God’s Word that was demanding obedience and submission (“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you...”). The saints are instructed to obey the leaders and submit to them because they were teaching God’s Word which required such a response.

The reason for responding this way is the seriousness of the leaders’ task: “for they keep watch over your souls...” The verb translated, “keep watch over,” could be understood literally as staying awake or on the alert. Bruce suggests the sense of “chasing away sleep” (Bruce, 1990, p. 385). A good example of this might be those times you’ve been driving, become very sleepy, and have to fight to stay awake. But here in Hebrews 13:17 we are better off thinking in terms of *being on the lookout* for someone’s spiritual life or *showing a diligent concern* for the spiritual wellbeing of another Christian. Eugene Peterson describes this activity as the “cure of souls” (Peterson, 1989, pages 55-65). Maybe a way to state this in terms of the entire message of Hebrews is: *local church leaders have been given authority by God to see that Believers keep believing and obeying the message of God communicated by Christ (cf. Hebrews 1:1ff.)*.

The concept of being a soul-watcher helps us understand what we can command parishioners to do. It helps us understand why preachers *do* give biblical instruction to their congregants. Church leaders are *protecting* the saints as they deliver God’s Word each Lord’s Day. This connects the meaning of Hebrews 13:17 with Hebrews 1:1-2 (“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...”) and the soon-to-follow, repeated warnings such as Hebrews 2:1 (“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.”) Spiritual leaders within a local church guard (says the NIV) the saints by alerting them to the temptations they face. They know that living with prone-to-rebellion-hearts in an anti-God society led by the arch-enemy of their soul spells potential spiritual disaster.

The leadership domain or fiefdom of a teaching pastor is the congregation’s souls. This helps define the theological limits of pastoral authority. Teaching pastors direct their listeners in all areas that affect their soul. So, in one sense, the only jurisdiction we have is in “purely” spiritual matters. But, think with me for a moment how the spiritual realm penetrates other areas. When is it right for you as a soul-watcher to meddle/intrude/interfere in the financial affairs of their parishioners? The answer is when financial matters affect their spiritual lives. When is it right for us to meddle in a parishioner’s

family, social, business, or leisurely affairs? The same answer: when those areas affect their soul.

This is the kind of soul-watching that goes on during the teaching time in church and this is not something that the saints do for themselves. To use another popular biblical analogy, sheep do not shepherd themselves. While there are over twenty “one another” responsibilities in the New Testament, soul-watching is not one of them. Commenting on the significance of the pronoun, *autoi*, contained in this phrase, “for *they* keep watch over,” Morris states that: “They and no one else” remain on the alert (Gaebelein, 1981, p. 152). Every saint needs their soul watched over by a spiritually qualified leader who teaches the Word and urges obedience and submission to God.

I am aware of the possibility that pastors might abuse their authority. More than likely you know of terrible cases where parishioners suffered from spiritual abuse and bullying. I believe this is one of the reasons why the character of the spiritual leader is spelled out so specifically in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, for instance. Qualified shepherds are *less* likely to abuse their authority. It should be mentioned, however, that God evidently was not so worried about possible spiritual abuse that it kept Him from using human, imperfect soul-watchers as part of His plan to make disciples.

Before we look briefly at the next Scripture, here’s what I’m trying to say. I take it that if we are going to talk about replacing pastoral preaching with something like Pagitt’s progressional dialogue, we need to factor in Hebrews 13:17’s understanding of what it means for a teaching pastor to be a soul-watcher. If preaching can be considered one aspect of or vehicle for soul-watching, then it appears to me that this contributes to the indispensability of preaching on the part of teaching pastors, not the saints. Does the act of saint-preaching-to-saint fulfil the role of soul-watching? While it is true that all soul-watchers are saints, it is not true that all saints are soul-watchers (more on that to follow when we look at Pagitt’s main theological reason for advocating progressional dialogue). I am suggesting that the teaching time is one of the most important soul-watching activities in any given week in the life of a local faith-family and, thereby arguing that Hebrews 13:17 argues for the *indispensability* of pastoral preaching.

A brief look at 1 Timothy 4:16

1 Timothy 4:16 reads: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

Whereas the instruction of Hebrews 13:17 is aimed at parishioners, the instruction in 1 Timothy 4:16 is aimed at teaching pastors. In this verse Timothy is instructed to “watch” (NIV) both his own character and also the content of his teaching ministry. The NASB translation, “pay close attention to,” adequately captures the meaning of a verb whose range of meaning includes to “aim at” (Arndt, 1979, 285). Anyone who has aimed a weapon at a target knows what it’s like to focus and pay close attention to detail—the bull’s-eye. Timothy was to put a bead or the crosshairs on himself and his teaching.

Teaching pastors must pay close attention to themselves. It is possible that they will stop believing and obeying while they are ministering to help others believe and obey the Gospel of Christ. I take it that because of the previous context of v. 15, part of paying close attention to ourselves involves making sure that we are regularly responding to God and progressing in Christlikeness (cf. v. 15 “so that your progress will be evident to all”). This means continuing to cultivate faith in and obedience to Christ. For years I’ve had on my wall in my study George Whitfield’s reaction to reading Henry Scougal’s, *Life of God*: “I put all trifling books away, and was determined to study to be a saint, and then to be a scholar.” Over the years I’ve had a few conversations with pastors who confessed to not paying attention to the condition of their own spiritual lives. Somewhere along the line they stopped responding to their own sermons, which probably means they stopped responding to the Word of God in their study during sermon preparation or in their own personal time with the Lord.

One of the most dangerous facets of pastoral ministry is the fact that it’s always possible to preach “good” sermons while living poorly and often nobody knows what’s happening. C. S. Lewis described a situation that mirrors the awful predicament of a pastor caught in the trap of not responding to the Word before asking others to do so: “And I went on adding detail to detail, progressing toward the moment when ‘I should know most and should least enjoy’” (Lewis, 1955, 165). Marshall writes, “The personal life and the work of the church leader are closely related and cannot be separated from one another” (Marshall, 1999, p. 558). Chrysostom put it this way: “the pastor must ‘himself first follow the advice he gave’” (Oden, 1989, p. 125). One way teaching pastors pay close attention to their spiritual condition is through the habit of responding to God’s Word in the study long before asking others to do so in the sanctuary.

Teaching pastors must also pay close attention to their teaching. Along with the potential danger of not believing and obeying Scripture comes the danger of not *teaching* Scripture. Paul urged Timothy to never stop teaching the Word (cf. v. 14 “Do not neglect the spiritual gift...” which was probably aimed at fighting against the temptation to neglect his teaching assignment). It’s possible that the danger involved teaching something *other than* what Paul had taught him (the NIV reads, “Watch your life and doctrine closely”). Timothy was being instructed to keep teaching and to keep teaching the Word of God.

Then we’re told to “persevere in these [two] things...” We must continue or persist in paying close attention to the character of our lives and the content of our teaching. We must continue to be sure we believe, obey, and teach God’s Word. The Greek phrase begins with the verb, *epimene*, which can mean “to continue, persist (in), persevere” (Arndt, 1979, p. 296). We are to stay at the work of being disciples and making disciples through our teaching. Oden makes the interesting comment: “Pastoral authority in this sense is less often abused than simply not used” (Oden, 1989, p. 126).

Now the remainder of v. 16 explains *how important* it is for teaching pastors to continually pay close attention to themselves and to their teaching: “for as you do this

you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” Somehow, the teaching time *in church* contributes to *saving both teaching pastor and parishioners*. I take it that when most of us pastors think about someone getting “saved” in church as a result of our preaching/teaching, we have in mind an unsaved person receiving Christ and becoming justified. That doesn’t appear to be Paul’s focus in this verse.

You may have read Richard Baxter’s famous line: “I preach as though ne’er to preach again, *as a dying man to dying men*.” I encountered the statement again a year or so ago while reading *The Mission of God* (Wright, 2006, p. 439). In light of 1 Timothy 4:16, with all due respect to Rev. Baxter’s intended meaning, I now read that line differently than I did. I *am* a dying man preaching to dying men and women and the cure for all of us is listening and responding to God’s Word in faith and obedience each Sunday. I’m not so sure we think about our teaching times as being instrumental in saving ourselves *and* our congregants, but this is what Paul seems to be saying. How often do you think about ensuring salvation for *yourself* as you teach the Word of God on a given Sunday morning? How often do you think about ensuring salvation for the professing Believers learning with you on any given Sunday morning? That’s what’s on the line every Sunday in church during the teaching time.

To think about preaching to the saints in this light contributes to the indispensability of preaching. Eternal salvation is at stake during every teaching time in church. Why would Timothy and his listeners, for instance, need *saving* during Timothy’s teaching since they were already saved? Or, let’s ask this question another way. What happens to *saved* pastors and *saved* parishioners during the teaching time that contributes to their salvation? How does teaching the Scriptures in church “ensure salvation both for [the teaching pastor] and for those who hear...” (the KJV and NIV are a bit closer to the actual wording, *soseis*, by reading “save”; the NASB has opted to interpret with “ensure salvation”)?

Fee suggests that “Salvation involves perseverance; and Timothy’s task in Ephesus is to model and teach the gospel in such a fashion that it will lead the church to perseverance in faith and love and hence to final, eschatological salvation” (Fee, 1988, p. 109). I am indebted to the writings of John Piper for understanding the place that unmerited, conditional grace has in our salvation (cf. Piper, 1995, pages 229-259). But in his book, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, Piper explains the place of preaching in the saving of the saints in church. In a chapter titled, *The Gravity and Gladness of Preaching*, Piper writes,

Gravity and earnestness in preaching is appropriate, not only (as we have seen) because preaching is God’s instrument for the weighty business of saving sinners and reviving the church, but also because it is God’s instrument for preserving the saints....Labor on behalf of the elect...is not icing on the cake of their eternal security. It is God’s appointed means of keeping them secure....We can say that eternal security is certain for the Christian, yet avoid a mechanical view that drains the blood-earnestness right out of the weekly ministry of preaching to the saints. Biblically God uses the earnest application of the means of grace to hold

his people secure; one of those means is the preaching of God's Word. Heaven and hell are at stake every Sunday morning not merely because unbelievers might be present, but also because our people are saved, 'If they continue in the faith' (Col. 1:23) [Piper, 1990, pages 59-60].

Later in the same book Piper explains the affect Jonathan Edwards' understanding of perseverance had on his view of preaching: "He saw preaching as a means of grace to assist the saints to persevere, and perseverance as necessary for final salvation. Therefore every sermon is a 'salvation sermon'—not just because of its aim to convert sinners, but also in its aim to preserve the holy affections of the saints and so enable them to confirm their calling and election, and be saved" (Piper, 1990, p. 80).

I realize that Piper's interpretation won't satisfy everyone. For an alternative interpretation you might profit from Lawson's article, *The Passion of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of 1 Timothy 4:13-16*, in which he writes, "As Timothy persevered in personal holiness and pursued teaching sound doctrine, he would personally grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. This does not mean Timothy would save himself from eternal condemnation, but that his personal godliness and sound preaching would stimulate his growth" (Lawson, 2002, p. 94). On the next page, however, Lawson gets closer, in my opinion, to the full strength of the verse: "But when the truth is preached through one who is fully absorbed in God's Word, the ministry will be wonderfully blessed by God, *ensuring the salvation* of those who sit under its exposition [emphasis added]" (Lawson, 2002, p. 95).

However you interpret Paul's instruction to Timothy, *something* grand happens through the teaching ministry of Scripture. That grand something makes me think we should think carefully about thoughts of downplaying a pastor's sermon in church. Any thoughts of replacing pastoral preaching with "conversations" should think through whether those conversations can accomplish what pastoral preaching accomplishes according to 1 Timothy 4:16. Can the teaching pastor and congregants be saved in those conversations? If so, how?

Interaction with some recent homiletical material that seems to be diminishing the importance of pastoral preaching in church

In Kenton Anderson's very helpful book, *Choosing to Preach*, he asks the question if one must be called to preach. He writes, "You don't hear so much about 'the call' to preach these days....Preaching....can be delegated, diminished, or even dropped in favor of other duties deemed important for the demands of the day. This might be seen as progress, though one can't escape the nagging sense that something wonderful has been lost (Anderson, 2006, p. 28). A couple of paragraphs later, however, Anderson begins to blur the distinction between preaching done by those "called" and preaching done by other Believers: "We may not all be professionals, paid to preach from pulpits, but if we are in Christ, we are called to preach in some capacity (Anderson, 2006, p. 28). While I agree with Anderson, I'm proposing that one reason why pastoral preaching is being delegated and diminished is because of a blurring of the distinction between preaching

“in some capacity” and preaching as a soul-watcher (again, using Hebrews 13:17 language). Below we’ll see how Pagitt’s understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers erases the distinction.

Later, in a section explaining his understanding of a form of preaching he calls, exposition with a capital E, Anderson writes, “The problem [of this approach] deepens when preachers, perhaps unintentionally, give the impression that their mediation of the text is required for their listeners to understand it” (Anderson, 2006, p. 36). In light of Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 is the mediation of Scripture by teaching pastors necessary? Anderson explains his view: “Practically, [the exposition with a capital E approach to preaching] sounds like it is going to be unbearably dull, and theologically, it violates my understanding of the accessibility (perspicacity) of the Bible for every believer [sic]” (Anderson, 2006, p. 36).

I take it that the doctrine of the *perspicuity* of the Bible needs to be understood in a way that does not water down the role of soul-watching. For a helpful look at the tension between Scripture’s difficulty and clarity, see *Reading the Bible Wisely* (Briggs, 2003, pages 53-69). In the chapter entitled, The Difficulty and Clarity of Scripture: Of Problems in Romans, Briggs writes, “Alongside this doctrine [of the clarity of Scripture] I would like to set the difficulty of Scripture, which is not, to my knowledge, an equally well-known theological position, but which can certainly be maintained alongside a view of ‘clarity’” (p. 54). Later Briggs writes, “There is no obvious theological reason why every believer should be able to read Scripture for themselves and work it all out: this is an individualistic vision which seems likely to be at odds with the way Christian wisdom works” (Briggs, 2003, p. 68). Scripture like Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 provide an obvious theological reason why every believer should listen to the Scriptures taught by a teaching pastor.

In his book, *A High View of Scripture?*, Allert nuances the understanding of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. He writes,

‘Those who are situated outside the church are not able to acquire any understanding of the divine discourse.’ These words, written by Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367), are in line with both Tertullian and Augustine. But it is precisely this attitude that many evangelicals find disturbing. Because popes and bishops of the church have at many times in Christian history misused their authority and status, most evangelicals have rejected the very idea of privileged interpretation. They believe that privileged interpretation squelches the prophetic voice and oppresses true spirituality. This belief is based on the misconception that evangelicals are indebted to the Protestant Reformation for freeing the Bible from the corrupting influence of privileged interpretation. But the Reformers were rejecting a particular interpretation as out of line with patristic interpretation of the gospel (Allert, 2007, p. 85).

Again, it appears that Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 support the existence of privileged interpretation in church for the purpose of aiding true spirituality—soul-watching and ensuring the salvation of both the teaching pastor and parishioners.

In his article, “Preaching *as* Dialogue”, Anderson makes a statement that opens the door for a diminishing of the role of pastoral preaching. He writes: “Increased dialogue in preaching would help us **deal with power and authority** issues in our preaching. Sermons that are *given* from the pulpit can tend toward a popish kind of power that gives a sense the sermon cannot be challenged or discussed...” (Anderson, 2007, p. 7). Both Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 portray that the teaching pastor does have authority during the teaching time, otherwise, for instance, congregants would not be instructed to “obey” and “submit to” their leaders. There is a significant difference between challenging a sermon and discussing it. The former response could make it difficult or even impossible for a parishioner to obey and submit to the teaching. Challenging a sermon could possibly interfere with that soul-watching event.

In that same article Anderson writes, “Preaching is a conversation between God and listeners. The preacher simply serves to lead this discussion. In fact, the preacher is one of the listeners, subject to the message just like everybody else” (Anderson, 2007, p. 10). This is helpful insight into what it means for pastors to lead while knowing we haven’t completely arrived (in the sense of not having to listen and respond to God’s Word anymore). It is true that the leader is simultaneously on the way and leading the way. Hebrews 13:7 makes it clear that the preacher is not *just* leading a discussion: “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” The leader’s faith-driven Christian conduct becomes a role model for the saints.

Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 suggest that preaching in church is more than “a conversation between God and listeners” and teaching pastors are doing more than “simply [serving] to lead this discussion.” Using the term, discussion, in light of the theology of these two Scriptures seems to downgrade the importance of the teaching time in church. Having obeyed and submitted to God’s Word in the study (i.e., being one of the listeners), teaching pastors urge that same response in the sanctuary in an effort to extend the grace of God through soul-watching. Lose’s understanding of Bakhtin may have some promise for including dialogue or discussion without diminishing the authority of the soul-watcher: “Preaching...is what Bakhtin might describe as a ‘provisional monologization.’ It is a monologue, in that one person undertakes an extended speech, but provisional, rather than final, in that it stems from listening and invites further speech in turn. Preaching...is neither a single word nor the final word; rather, it exists to prompt and nurture the larger conversation of the faithful” (Lose, 2003, p. 107). I would add that the single word that a pastor has preached on a particular Sunday morning is final enough to prompt faith, obedience/submission, while still prompting more dialogue within the faith-family.

In Pagitt’s book, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, we encounter perhaps the strongest plea for the Church to abandon the way in which most pastoral preaching occurs in local churches.

Whereas Anderson argued from the doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scriptures that a pastor's mediation of the Scripture is not necessary, Pagitt argues from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (POAB). Pagitt believes that the prevalent way Sunday sermons are developed and delivered—by a teaching pastor alone—is partly the result of the Church ignoring the doctrine of the POAB (Pagitt, 2006, p. 23). According to Pagitt, the doctrine of the POAB means the following:

- *All believers should share the responsibility of preaching Sunday sermons.* Pagitt writes, “As a pastor I want to be a part of a community where the workings of God are imbedded in *all*, where the roles of teaching and learning aren't mine alone but instead are something intrinsic to who we are as a people [emphasis added]” (Pagitt, 2006, p. 23). Later he writes: “I can imagine a church—and a people—who see themselves as preachers in one another's lives. Not preachers with inarguable speeches, but people who engage, inform, and build life into one another. Any preaching practice that results in less collective interaction and building of one another should be used very sparingly and abandoned as soon as possible....What I'm advocating is that we become communities who listen to the preachers among us, not just the preacher standing in front of us” (Pagitt, 2006, p. 26). According to Pagitt's interpretation of the POAB, teaching pastors should no longer be the only ones given the right to preach sermons in church.
- *All believers have the ability and authority to preach the Sunday sermons.* If all believers should be involved in preaching Sunday sermons, then it follows that all believers have the ability and authority to do so. Overlapping with Anderson, Pagitt suggests, that “Speaching [delivering a completed sermon developed by the pastor alone]...creates a belief that even in the presence of dozens, hundreds, even thousands of other Christians, there are a select few who know God's truth and who get to tell others about God. There is hardly a preacher who wants her hearers to leave with the notion that they must access the truth of God through the preacher. But that is precisely the message speaching perpetuates: The pastor has the authority to speak about God, and you don't” (Pagitt, 2006, p. 29).
- *All believers have the right to disagree with the pastor's sermon.* Pagitt's understanding of the POAB includes viewing the pastor's sermon as contestable. Pagitt writes, “Because speaching is reinforced with religious significance, it sends the message to the hearers that not only are they invited to draw the same conclusions but that they also ought to out of religious conviction. For many the thought of disagreeing with a sermon is tantamount to disbelief. That is what makes speaching particularly insidious” (Pagitt, 2006, p. 49). Much later he adds, “Because of the assumed power of the preacher, our words are not understood as truth meant to be viewed as one perspective of reality, but as The Truth that isn't touched by the truths of others, certainly not the truths of those listening to the sermon. We shut down the chance for a person's perspective to be taken seriously” (Pagitt, 2006, p. 137).

As I said earlier, this interpretation of what the POAB means and its implications for preaching in church should include some discussion of the theology of Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16. Within these three bullets, I've identified six issues that are touched

by these two Scriptures: the “inarguable” sermon, disagreeing with the sermon, the sermon being only one perspective of reality, the preachers among us differentiated from the preacher in front of us, parishioners having to access the truth of God through the preacher, and the preacher having the authority to speak. These six can be placed into two broader, interrelated categories: argue-ability and authority.

Concerning a sermon’s *argue-ability*, as was stated earlier, one reason why arguing with a pastor’s sermon is ill-advised is because this stance may short-circuit the act of having one’s soul cared for. In some cases, disagreeing with a sermon could be equal to unbelief/disobedience and destructive to the soul. Other perspectives of reality held by parishioners may not match God’s perspective delivered by the teaching pastor. Concerning a sermon’s *authority*, the difference between the preachers among us and the preacher in front of us may be an issue of who God has chosen and equipped to watch over souls. Teaching pastors have the authority to speak in church because God has entrusted His people into their care. Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 12-14 and 1 Peter 4:11 teach that the saints who are gifted to speak have the authority to do so in church (notice Peter’s division of “whoever speaks... whoever serves...”).

Others have struggled with the relationship between the doctrine of the POAB and pastoral authority. Young writes, “The insistence upon authority in pastoral leadership cannot stand without some modification of the doctrine of the priesthood of believers” (Young, 1993, p. 145). It appears that since the New Testament clearly alludes to pastoral authority, modification of the doctrine of the POAB (at least as understood by Pagitt, for instance) is necessary for the sake of the spiritual health of the Church. Ogden also states the apparent paradox between the doctrine of the POAB and pastoral authority: “On the one hand, we affirm that a ‘minister’ participates as every Christian does in the priesthood of all believers, but in the next breath we list special responsibilities that are marked ‘for the ordained only.’ We cannot have it both ways” (Ogden, 2003, p. 241). On the basis of our two primary Scriptures, it appears we must have it both ways. Ogden states the tension even more clearly: “One of the reasons that the priesthood of all believers has not been realized is that we practice a priesthood within a priesthood” (Ogden, 2003, p. 241). I take this to be a biblical practice.

Some questions that surface when the theology of Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 collides with this trend to downplay pastoral preaching in church

Since one purpose for our time together is to further the discussion of the theology of preaching, I suggest the following questions, a few of which have been introduced in the paper.

- We all interpret Scripture through the lens of our own historical context. How might some of the popular thinking of our current culture contribute to the portrayed understanding of the POAB, the perspicuity of Scripture, and the resulting trend to downplay the importance of pastoral preaching?

- The recently released Willow Creek study, *Reveal*, suggests that as parishioners grow in their relationship with Christ, they need the church less. Therefore, it is important that we help believers become “self-feeders.” Is it true that as people grow, they need the church less (in particular, less sermons)? How might you balance helping people become self-feeders and their need to hear pastoral preaching? You may be interested in reading Michael Horton’s article, *No Church, No Problem?* (July/August 2008, pages 16-20).
- For years pollsters/marketers like Barna have pointed to the trend in parishioners shifting from an institutional church to some alternative faith community or experience (such as seeking spiritual input through the internet). How does the theology of Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16 address such a trend and, in particular, the way preaching is done (or not done)?
- Is it possible for parishioners to implement Hebrews 13:17 if they disagree with the pastor’s sermon? What levels of disagreement can coexist with obedience to Hebrews 13:17 so that soul-watching continues? When would it be biblically admissible for a parishioner to disagree with their pastor’s sermon?
- Are the “preachers among us” (Pagitt’s terminology) authorized to watch over the souls of others (including the souls of the soul-watchers) while they teach and preach God’s Word in church? Would it be possible to delegate authority so that sheep could teach and watch over the souls of other sheep (including the soul[s] of the shepherd[s])? Is there a place in the Church for preaching and teaching that doesn’t include soul-watching?
- Does a concept such as “progressional dialogue” have a place in the disciple-making process in church? Is there a way to increase the level of involvement (true dialogue) while still maintaining the distinction between the soul-watcher and saints?

Concluding thoughts

I have been attempting to argue that one thing that makes preaching indispensable is the fact that teaching pastors function as soul-watchers who preserve their faith and the faith of their parishioners. The role of soul-watcher also affects our understanding of who should be teaching Scripture in church during what is often referred to as the sermon. I am suggesting that one reason why some homileticians and pastors are diminishing the importance of listening to sermons is the separation of the preaching event from the act of soul-watching.

I believe that emphasizing the need to listen to a preacher’s sermon is one way in which the Church offsets a potentially devastating trend in our society. In his chapter entitled, *Membership*, C. S. Lewis wrote this intriguing analysis: “It delights me that there should be moments in the services of my own Church when the priest stands and I kneel. As democracy becomes more complete in the outer world and opportunities for reverence are successively removed, the refreshment, the cleansing, and invigorating returns to inequality, which the Church offers us, become more and more necessary” (Lewis, 1949, p. 171). I admit there is much in this quote that offends my modern/post-modern

sensibilities and, yet, in light of my studies in Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16, I think I get what Lewis was driving at.

Let me conclude with Horton's remedy: "Pastors, teachers, and elders are not 'life coaches' who help us in our personalized goals for spiritual fitness, but gifts given by the Ascended Lord so that the whole church might become mature and less susceptible to being spiritually duped (Eph. 4:1-16)...We are commanded not to become self-feeders who mature beyond the nurture of the church, but to submit ourselves to the preaching, teaching, and oversight of those shepherds whom God has placed over us in Christ....The church's ministry is exercised faithfully when the people are fed, not when the sheep are expected to become their own shepherds" (Horton, 2008, p. 17, 20).

In the spirit of Bakhtin's provisional monologization, I'm aware that what I've written is provisional, rather than final and hope this will prompt and nurture the larger conversation of homiletics and pastors concerning the theology of preaching. If you are interested in a more detailed analysis on this topic and struggle a bit with insomnia, email me at randy@bcmj.com and I'll attach a copy of, "Is That What the Priesthood of All Believers Means? Some Hermeneutical Considerations of Doug Pagitt's Interpretation of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers as it Pertains to Pastoral Preaching."

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