

Principles That Guide Ministry in the Church

Welcome back to the church and ministry class. Today, what we're going to talk about is the principles that guide ministry in the church. As you think about being a servant leader, as you think about loving your congregation or loving those in charge that God has put in your charge. There are basic principles that are the timeless ministry principles. And many of these two are taken from the book of 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul is ministering to a very difficult church in the Corinthian church so he gives us insights on how we can very effectively minister to people. And these principles basically guide. What I would suggest you do as a pastor someday and even now is have these principles, write them down, even the passage, and throughout your ministry---and I do this---throughout your ministry, I will go back and remind myself again of these principles for ministry. Here they are.

Number one, live for Christ, not for self. And this is very important as servant leaders. The question is, who are we serving? If it's not clear that we're serving Christ, we probably should not be a pastor. In the 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 is for the love of Christ that constrains us. Because thus we judge. If one died for all, then we all die. And that He died for all, that we will live. Should not Him forth live into ourselves but into Him which died for them and rose again." That is just a powerful, powerful feed of what it means to minister to others.

Principle number two, if we are to live for Christ, know that you're an ambassador for Christ. Do not see anybody from a worldly point of view. Do not pigeon hold someone as a project case. Okay, what do you mean by that? Well, what happens so often in pastoring, and look at for yourself, just look at that 2 Corinthians 5:16-17,20. Look at that. What happens in pastoring so often is that sometimes we can forget that we really are ambassadors for Christ and we start looking at someone from our pre-disposed opinions and we pigeon hold them often and sort of put them in a file cabinet and remind that they

need this, this, this, this and them boom, done. And we don't really take it as we're ambassadors for Christ.

I'll give you some examples. I'll give you an example from my own life. I come from Dutch background. And Dutch has this real thing about money and how you spend it and how you save it. Or we have another thing about cleanliness. And some of you who have Dutch background can laugh about that. Well, what happens is that some of the most powerful cultural enforcements, you come as someone who has a different view of how they see it and how you see it on something.

Or another thing Dutch have is like work that the men work, work, work, work. And the Dutch women who often marry the men want their husbands to work. So Dutch has this thing often about money, about work and about cleanliness. So now, someone comes into your ministry and you happen to have this Dutch enculturation. You might look at them and get caught up in their own cultural background. It's not like your cultural background. And that can be such a problem for ministry. You're an ambassador for Christ and Christ is at work in each person how God is at work in their life. Don't pigeon hold them into how you see that your background was superior to theirs.

Now at times, your background can help them. Your gifts can bring them some help. But understand, God has an agenda for them. God is going to take someone their next step. Sometimes, I think as pastors, we think how can we get someone to be like us as fast as possible. No, it's how can they be like Christ in their next step?

We want to be an authentic witness. Always be an authentic witness. You know, 2 Corinthians 6:3-13, "We put no stumbling block in anyone's paths. Rather, their ministry not be discredited. Rather than servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way." And then Paul has this incredible list. And he says, "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We do not withhold our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children —open wide your hearts also."

See, authentic means that you really are in partnership with the people that you're ministering to. You're transparent appropriately and you're not hiding anything. You are ministering an authentic witness. Even for unbelievers it's really fascinating. In the past, I know in my parents' generation, there

is this talk about don't let your dirty laundry be seen. Now, everything in moderation. On one level, you don't want all your dirty laundry to be seen, but on the other level, when someone sees that you're not perfect and you share struggles that you go through, then they say, "Well, if Pastor can struggle for a few things and he's self-aware about it, if the Pastor can struggle, hey, then maybe I can come over some of my things as well." It's that relationship of authentic witness.

Here's another principle. The macro issues really do matter. That is your relationship ideas. Your doctrines, your habits. Don't be yolked with unbelievers. As a pastor, what's going to guide you is going to be who you hang around with. Sometimes, pastors don't have any friends within their church. So they have other relationships and they can actually hurt the church. Or but even in the church, there is issues of boundaries that we talk about actually the pastoral care and marriage class. Doctrine is really important. That a pastor would study biblical doctrine to actually spend a priority of your time learning even more about the doctrine of the trinity or apologetic issues.

Take continuing education. Take some classes at CLI if you're just taking this class, and hey, take the church history class. Learn about church history. And how you are on a daily basis, your habit, are all very important. Even though they're not specifically maybe seen directly by people in the church every day, these are principles that guide your ministry and that you're involved in growing, being teachable with good habits.

Here's another principle. God has always used conviction to transform lives. Understand that. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation. It's just a principle in ministry. It is fascinating that a lot of times people will come to us with a problem and what's happened is this there's already now but a train wreck. And sometimes, as pastors, you just say, "Why didn't they come to us six months ago before this happened?"

Well, godly sorrow brings repentance. Lot of times, we are there to pick up the pieces with them. And when they're ready to pick up the pieces, they're ready to be teachable. Understand that principle and it will guide your ministry. And here's what I find. That if you had to talk to that same couple six months earlier, they would have been convicted. They would have looked at you as meddling. Some of my biggest mistakes is that I saw a potential danger and I hovered over it too quickly and I zoomed it on

it because I know, after a year, a pastor for a while, you're experienced and you know this leads to this that leads to this.

So I'll come in there and I'll know I've got to stop it right here. And then what happens? There's a fence. How could the pastor think about this way? How could he think of us this way? And again, that's what happens. That point where the godly sorrow that brings repentance is not quite there. That teachable moment is not ready to be talked about.

Here's another principle. Consider carefully a pastoral care approach. I put this in the church and ministry and we're going to talk a lot about that in pastoral care marriage class. One thing to always be careful is just don't shoot from the hips when somebody talks about their problems. In ministry, really listen. Become a listener. And the apostle Paul, "This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

When somebody will come to you and say "Pastor, that person, this, this, this, this and this." Just don't react. Get the facts. Check things out before you right away react. I'll give you an example of that. One person comes to you and says, "My wife wants to divorce me." And then you meet with the wife. Why do you want to divorce him? And then you find out that, hold on, he's like beating her. And he's using some legalistic, "She's supposed to be my wife approach" and she's just being abused. So if you right away pounce on her, you become the next male oppressor of this woman who is right now not being treated in love.

Now do you mean you support divorce? No. What it means is you're getting all the facts in ministry. And you can come back and talk to him like "Hey, what gives with this?" Now, in that whole process, be very careful to continue to get the facts and don't make snap judgments. Principles that God ministry is to carefully listen and get the facts and then, in a humble way, in this case, maybe with accountability, you would actually create a ministry plan for that particular couple.

Here's another principle. Always remember that spiritual warfare is certainly fought. And in 2 Corinthians 10, you know the apostle Paul talks about how there is weapons of warfare and they're not carnal. In a lot of times in the ministry, it's that spiritual prayer, that spiritual warfare prayer. A lot of times if I'm ministering in to someone before I even minister, I say, "Lord, will you bind the evil one? Will

you give me the tools? And if there is a demonic apparition here, help me to see what I'm supposed to do here and what I'm supposed to say, and Holy Spirit, cover this whole thing." Sometimes, people go on ministry. Oh here are our principles. Here are some things. You're supposed to this way, this way, this way, this way, this way. And we're forgetting that we don't fight against flesh and blood. But against principalities in power. That there is a spiritual warfare dimension in most problems.

Principles that guide ministry is be a person who builds hope-filled community in culture. I tell you. The pastor has to become the encourager and you see Paul that way. "For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord has given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed." In 2 Corinthians 12:19 "Thinking that we have excused ourselves unto you. We speak before God in Christ but we do all things. Dearly beloved, for your edifying."

In the end of the day, it is about encouraging. The evil one is the accuser. The pastor is the encourager. We encourage our parishioners and point them to Christ. We get out of the way of ourselves. And Christ is Lord. In the end of the day, if we're not thinking about building up, even people who are very hurtful to you. In the end of the day, a pastor sees that whatever people do, you point them to Christ.

A pastor with a critical spirit who basically treats people poorly, who basically talks down to people, who basically thinks they're the answer person and the people are stupid. Yeah, these stupid people, what kind of congregation and they really need me. Arrogant. That pastor who does encourage will not go far in ministry. That Christian leader will not make an impact as God has designed leaders and pastors to do. So build a hope-filled community with encouragement even when you don't want to because there is some offense that somebody has given towards you. Still, when you are persecuted, bless.

Another principle is the challenging of spiritual authority comes in many forms and be ready for it. Be ready for it. There will be false apostles. Deceitful workers. Transforming them into apostles of Christ. And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. There will always be dissenters, distracters, people who spread dissension. And be ready. How can you be ready for that?

Well, first of all. With the principles that we're just talking about, humility, transparency, when someone attacks you, don't take the bait. Talk to even the dissenters, one on one first. Matthew 18, if

the dissenters could not be changed, bring someone else along. Even if necessary, bring him before the elders. Bringing in such a way that's blessing. You can bring something for the elders and have like a inquisition and blow the dissenter away. Or you can sort of know it's going to come. And be ready. And be ready to talk and be ready to encourage. But also be ready to please God. Sometimes, there is no other way than to bless the dissenter on to a church where the dissenter can fit in better.

A lot of times, it really is a vision issue. You'll have someone who just really doesn't like your ministry. Well, maybe what they really don't like is how the vision of the church goes this structure and they really believe in another direction. And it's really that personal. It really is a vision disagreement. And as a pastor, lot of times, and here's what I really encourage you Christian leaders as you're growing and learning, help it to be seen as a vision issue, not as something personal. Because in that personality thing, things can really go down in a hurry.

Always stay aware of your own weaknesses. In some ways, I've said this now, again, almost the third time in different words. Humility, don't think too highly of yourself. But the apostle Paul was very much aware of his own weaknesses. He even knew he had a thorn in the flesh. And he knew that he was very weak in some things. But then he understood that in those weaknesses, God's power would rest upon him. These weaknesses don't have to take you out of ministry. These weaknesses can be used by God in a powerful way because when you understand struggle, you will help those who struggle. But be aware of those weaknesses.

I'll give you some concrete example. If you have, as a pastor, a let's say over talkative personality, ask your spouse to help you when you're talking too much. Be aware of that. Or let's say you have a struggle with sin. The Bible says you can have a drink in moderation. But you know what? You can't do that. Some believers believe, and maybe you're one of them, you can never drink. But others, well they can have a drink. But if you have any disposition towards alcohol or anything that will hurt your witness, you know what? Be aware of that weakness. And just don't have any alcohol.

Or let's say it's pornography. You have to lay in your life the boundaries that that is not going to be something that's going to hurt your ministry. Or, on and on and on and on and on it goes. But be aware of these things. And even if you struggle with them, your whole ministry, even in those struggles that help you ministered others who struggled more. But don't have this thing where "This is not me. I don't

have to worry.” No. If the apostle Paul had weaknesses, I may have weaknesses, you’re going to have weaknesses. Don’t allow those weaknesses to sink your ministry. Put those weaknesses before God in accountability with others. Be aware of those weaknesses and realize that despite how weak I am, it is God who gets the glory.

These principles, I went through this list rather quickly. And you can go listen to the presentation again. But these are principles when maybe you can take one at a time or put them into your devotions where you’re just thinking about it and maybe some of these passages memorized. In ministry, these principles guide pastoral caring ministry. Ministry in the church. Leadership in the church, leadership in your organization. And when those principles guide your ministry, your effect on people is even more real and present. Why? Because you know what the principles talk about? They talk about God. They’re from the Bible. Henry didn’t make these principles up and say, “Follow the principle that I made up.”

This is how leaders from the past like the apostle Paul understood church and ministry. In some ways, they are sort of principles of the heart that are not necessarily on the surface. But these principles of the heart make a big difference. And if these principles are lived out in and applied, ministry is even more winsome and powerful. God pours out His Holy Spirit in a teachable servant who loves, who leads, pointing to Christ, a servant who looks at themselves and know they really don’t have it together in their own flesh. But it is really about serving our Lord Jesus Christ in ministry.