

"DEVELOPING THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE"

{1 Thessalonians 5:12-24}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

November 23, 2008

The Apostle Paul portrays the church as a community loved and chosen by God...

- ✚ ...the church draws its very life from God—it is in Him we live and move and have our very being.
- ✚ ...the church then manifests this life by our love for one another...by our personal faith...and our eternal hope
- ✚ ...the church is a family—that is why we frequently refer to one another as sisters and brothers
- ✚ ...and our mutual relationships then profoundly affects our mutual behavior
 - ...we are called to comfort one another
 - ...pray for one another
 - ...support one another
 - ...build each other up
 - ...encourage one another
 - ...and genuinely love one another

In our text of the morning we see Paul's vision for the church family spelled out.

...first, he addresses the pastorate

...second, he writes about the fellowship of the local church

...third, he writes about our public worship

THE PASTORATE

"Now we ask you, brothers (and sisters) to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

In Acts 20:28 the pastor is referred to as the "shepherd of the church of God" who has been called to oversee God's flock purchased with His blood.

Dr. Robert Schuller tells someone asking him how many members there were in his church. Dr. Schuller replied, "None, it's not my church—it belongs to God! I'm just the caretaker!"

Paul is saying in these verses that it is God's will that the local church should enjoy pastoral oversight—but it's not God's will that pastor should monopolize ministries, but rather multiply them.

Paul gives three expressions about the pastorate in verses 12 and 13...

1. **"Respect those who WORK HARD among you!"** The faithful shepherd is one who is on duty 24/7. Contrary to what some may think, it's not a Sundays-only occupation. Whether it is study and the preparation for sermons, visiting the sick, counseling the disturbed, instructing people for marriage and baptism, being available to church personnel, serving as the chief CEO of the organization, or just simply diligently interceding in prayer for the members—these are but a few of the tasks of the overseer.

2. Leaders are those who are **“over you in the Lord.”** Pastors are servant leaders whom God has placed over the flock—but not a tyrannical leadership—but with a servant's heart.

3. Christian leaders are those **“who admonish you!”** The pastor's task has been described as that of comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. That goes with real pastoral leadership.

And, what is the congregation's attitude to be towards the pastor? John R. W. Stott writes: **“They are neither to despise them, as if they were dispensable, nor to flatter or fawn on them as if they were popes or princes!”**

Paul writes: **“Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”** This calls for the combination of appreciation and affection...and when practiced will enable pastors and people to minister as God has ordained them to. This is God's design for the church.

The church that God blesses is the one where the church family recognizes that God...

“...gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we ALL reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...then, we will no longer be infants...instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in ALL things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ...” {Ephesians 4:11-14,15}

THE FELLOWSHIP

“And we urge you, brothers (and sisters), warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else!”
(14-15)

The existence of pastors does not relieve members of their responsibilities for one another. Each member is called upon to give pastoral care for members of the congregation.

Three groups are singled out for specialized care—

1. **“Warn those who are idle”**
2. **“Encourage the timid”**
3. **“Help the weak”**

Paul's saying—embrace these people—put your arms around them—fold/hold them in the fellowship. Let them know they're loved and that you genuinely care for them. He sums this up by saying, **“Be patient with everyone!”** This calls for a demonstration to/for others of the patience God has demonstrated towards us.

Secondly, he moves to groups needing help with their behavior—and this calls us all to sit-up and listen.

1. **“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong!”**
2. **“Always TRY to be kind to each other and everyone else!”**

WORSHIP

Paul lists seven steps

1. Rejoice always
2. Pray without ceasing
3. In everything give thanks—for this is the will of God for you!
4. Do not quench the Spirit
5. Do not despise prophecies
6. Test all things; hold fast to what is good
7. Abstain from every form of evil

The first three of these are the marks of the church as God intended for it to be...

1. A joyful church—a church that celebrates
2. A praying church—a church that seriously intercedes for one another
3. A thankful church—people gather to praise and give thanks

And Paul adds—*“This is God’s will for you...!”* And, that is the church that is open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and is anointed by God.

CONCLUSION

Since September 1, 1978 it has been my joy and privilege to serve as your pastor. I’ve tried my best during this time to be a servant-leader of the flock that God entrusted to my care. I’ve baptized and officiated at the marriage your children. I’ve buried your loved ones. I’ve prayed with you...wept with you...rejoiced with you...and we’ve become family. **YOU ARE MY FAMILY!**

When I became your pastor I was 41 years old in the prime of my life. On Monday I will turn 72 and realizing that I’m heading toward the sunset years of my life.

The time has come for me to step down as your pastor. I announced to the session on Wednesday my intention to retire as pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church effective April 30, 2009. My last Sunday in the pulpit will be on Easter Sunday—April 12th.

I want to make clear that I am not retiring from ministry—the “call” that God placed upon me in July, 1958 was a lifetime call. At this time I’m not exactly sure what God has planned for me when I awaken in El Sombroso Oaks on May 1, but I assure you that I will be involved in ministry wherever God leads.

I do know this—you will always remain in my heart...in my thoughts...and in my prayers. You are my family—my sisters and my brothers. In the next 158 days I am going to do all I can to work with a Trinity’s session to help to prepare you for the next step in your journey...and to begin the process of preparing to call a new pastor to shepherd this flock.

My love for you is unceasing. I will miss you! Irma will miss you! Please pray for us as we prepare to leave our home and move to Los Gatos and begin the next phase in our lives!