Doctor of Souls
The Art of Pastoral Theology
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Foreword

In conservative Lutheran circles, many readers are familiar with the pastoral theology book entitled *The Shepherd Under Christ*, written by my father, Armin W. Schuetze, and his contemporary at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Irwin J. Habeck. As the introduction to that text indicates, it was based on John Schaller’s *Pastorale*, which appeared in 1913. This demonstrates that much of sound pastoral practice remains the same through the ages because these practices are drawn from the timeless truths of Scripture. A century ago a pastor visited home-bound members, administered private Communion, searched out straying members, applied the ministry of the keys, offered spiritual counsel and guidance on a variety of issues, consoled families at the deaths of loved ones, and taught and preached the Word of God. These activities are still a part of gospel-centered pastoral care today. So we see that *The Shepherd Under Christ*, which outlines the best practices in these practical areas, is still a helpful pastoral theology text for the seminary student and veteran pastor alike. The purpose of this book is not to update or replace *The Shepherd Under Christ*. That book stands for what it is, a helpful tool for pastoral ministry, even in the new millennium.

However, some aspects of pastoral ministry have changed since the 1970s when *The Shepherd Under Christ* was published. As stated above, the author’s purpose was not to do a remake of *The Shepherd Under Christ* but to provide a fresh look at pastoral ministry and offer some guidance in areas that were not specifically addressed in that book. For example, some of the ethical medical dilemmas that a pastor can face in 21st-century ministry were unheard of 40 or 50 years ago. Or we think of the many challenging situations the counseling pastor confronts as he ministers to Christian singles and families. This writer recalls his father mentioning that in the small town in Minnesota lake country where he grew up, there was one woman known as “the
divorced lady.” Today we are not only faced with divorce more frequently, but also abortion, sexual abuse, cohabitation, blended families, same-sex couples, and countless other marriage and family challenges.

The Counseling Shepherd, also written by Armin W. Schuetze together with Frederick A. Matzke, serves as a helpful companion to The Shepherd Under Christ, especially for the counseling pastor. Doctor of Souls seeks to build on that counseling material from the perspective of this author, who is both a counseling pastor and a licensed professional counselor.

You will notice that this book does not cover every area of pastoral theology equally. While it does touch upon subjects such as evangelism and pastoral leadership, it does not devote entire chapters to them, which one could easily do. That is because this book is designed to be a part of a series. For those who wish a more in-depth treatment on evangelism, this author would direct them to the helpful resource We Believe, Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism by David J. Valleskey. As far as pastoral leadership is concerned, this subject will be covered by a future publication.

This writer wishes to thank the many pastors, both individually and in groups at pastoral conferences, who offered their input for this volume. It is deeply appreciated.

This book is offered with the prayer that it will help train future pastors and also be a helpful resource to pastors in the field.
The Pastoral Theology G.U.I.D.E.
A Model for Pastoral Ministry

Introduction
As ministers of the gospel, we are shepherds of the Good Shepherd and doctors of the Great Physician. We serve the people the Lord has placed under our care, and in doing so, we serve the Lord of the church. Jesus put it plainly, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

The Lord, our Great Physician, did not leave us when he called us into practice. His promise, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20), assures us that he is the attending physician every time we prescribe a salutary treatment for a hurting soul or perform spiritual surgery on a straying soul.

The Lord also equips us with the necessary instruments to set up and carry out our spiritual practice. He gives us his Word. Like a surgical knife, it is “sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow” (Heb 4:12). This two-sided sword of law and gospel equips us to cure the sin-sick souls that saturate this world. Applying it properly is “taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience.” Martin Luther considered one who mastered

---Pastoral Point to Ponder---
“Anyone desiring to become a genuine δόκομος, a servant approved to the Lord, must first become a Christian. He may possibly make a correct presentation of every dogma, but that is not sufficient. He must also understand how to minister to each soul in his audience the very thing it needs. This is possible when the preacher is able to make an exact investigation of the condition of each soul. True, that is very difficult, just as the diagnosis is the most difficult part of a physician’s skill. Using the quick and sharp Word of God is not all that you have to do. With this sharp sword you may very easily slay souls if you do not minister to their necessities.”
(Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, pp. 52,53)

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this art a true doctor of theology. And that is what pastoral theology is all about. It is the art of applying the law and gospel principles of God’s Word to practical situations in an evangelical manner.

Pastoral theology is nothing new. It is as old as the church itself. In the early days of his ministry as shepherd-king over God’s people, Solomon faced a case of pastoral theology. He had prayed for a discerning heart, which God promised to provide. We can see the Lord’s answer to Solomon’s prayer in the insightful way he handled the two women who claimed to be the mother of the same child (1 Ki 3:16-28).

As the early Christian church spread throughout the Mediterranean world, the apostles faced issues of pastoral theology. Since John Mark failed to stay the course, Paul considered him a burden rather than a blessing on a previous mission journey. So when Paul and Barnabas were putting together their mission team for an upcoming trip, they had differences of opinions about whom they should include. Barnabas vouched for his cousin John Mark. Paul questioned his commitment to ministry. Their disagreement caused an impasse. They went their separate ways. It was a judgment call—an application of pastoral theology. It was not a matter of what was the morally right thing to do but the wise thing.

It was the summer of 1527. Once again the Black Death was making its way through Europe. Is a Christian morally bound to stay and care for the sick and dying? Or as a steward of his own life and health, should he avoid these places of the plague? The Lutheran Christians in Breslau addressed these questions to Martin Luther. His pastoral response came in the form of a pamphlet: Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague. In this pamphlet, as in many others, Luther applied the doctrine of Scripture to practical, pastoral matters and served as a doctor of souls.

We are dealing with a conflict in the congregation. Some of it is due to personality clashes. Yet there are also spiritual issues we need to

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3Here we are using the term evangelical to mean “correctly applying law and gospel, with the gospel predominating.” This follows Thesis 25 in Walther’s The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching” (p. 403).
4In 1 Kings 3:9 the Hebrew literally says “a heart to hear.” Among other things, this would reflect the great need for listening skills in the exercise of pastoral care.
address. How do we apply a persistent yet patient approach as we manage these members and strive toward peace and unity among the body of believers?

All of these situations involve applying pastoral theology to pastoral ministry. In each case the Lord’s servant strives to apply God’s Word to complex and emotional situations. Finding a God-pleasing course of action is not always an exact science. In some cases God’s Word speaks clearly. No, God’s Word does not allow a member to divorce his wife simply because he does not love her anymore. No, God’s Word does not allow the treasurer to steal some of the church offerings in order to feed his gambling addiction. In these cases it is clear how God’s Word applies to a particular case of pastoral theology. We know it will not be an easy application. The flesh is both weak and strong. In weakness, one of God’s sheep has fallen into sin. And this sheep may be strongly resisting what God’s Word has to say. Yet God’s Word speaks clearly to the issue.

But in other cases the principles of Scripture do not stand out in black and white. The man claims that his wife deserted their relationship. But did she? A member is struggling with substance abuse and the family is enabling him. Whom does the pastor help first? The cohabitating couple says they are sorry for their sin, but their fruits of repentance are weak at best.

The history of the church provides many examples of church leaders who were deeply involved in the nuts and bolts of ministry. Sometimes these leaders did not make wise decisions. The same Solomon who showed discernment with the two mothers also showed a lack of discernment in his choice of wives. The number of his wives alone was cause for concern. But his choice of an Egyptian wife and his desire to build a temple to her god reflected folly not wisdom. Peter’s decision to withdraw from “potluck” fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch showed a lack of judgment that the apostle Paul had to question. Luther’s dealings with Philip of Hesse were not his finest moments as a pastoral leader. Any experienced pastor can remember more than a few situations when he wishes he would have done things differently, when his discernment seemed to be blinded by human weakness, emotion, or pride. The apostle Paul did not exaggerate when he said we are clay jars holding the treasure of the gospel. A close inspection reveals more than a few cracks in the clay.

The goal of this book is not to outline what to do in each ministry situation. Circumstances vary. Each case brings with it varying factors, emotions, personalities, and gifts, not to mention biblical principles that guide our decisions. Pastoral ministry is not an exact
science; it is an art. It is the art of applying the law and gospel principles of God’s Word to practical situations in an evangelical manner. This art not only deals with black and white but also with many shades of gray. But even in those gray areas, God calls us to care for his souls and glorify him.

The Pastoral Theology G.U.I.D.E.

This book is not a pastoral theology ethics manual that tells us what to do in each ministry situation. Rather, it presents the principles of Scripture that apply to pastoral care and then offers a method of applying those principles to various situations. To help accomplish this, we find the Pastoral Theology G.U.I.D.E. This guide has five steps that an experienced pastor often does naturally. Yet even the veteran pastor makes mistakes and can benefit from having a simple template to follow as he continues to pastor God’s people. We see five simple points in the G.U.I.D.E. We should not apply them in a methodical and mechanical manner. Rather, they provide a framework for pastoral care.

Gather information

Before we can apply the principles of Scripture to a situation and take a God-pleasing course of action, we have to make sure we have all the information we need. This is especially challenging when we face cultural factors, whether it be nuances among different ethnic groups or the culture of a region, congregation, or family unit. In some cases we may also need some information about a person’s background or past experiences. These things can shape how a person sees a situation and reacts to it. Perhaps he or she sees the present situation through the filter of a previous experience and this shades the way the person hears or reacts to the situation. For example, a person whose efforts to help out were criticized in the past may be reluctant to participate in a congregational workday.

This part of the G.U.I.D.E. also recognizes that there are two sides to every story. Hearing both sides helps us follow a course of action that is honest and fair. Such an approach helps God’s people and glorifies God. This is where we as pastors need to apply good listening and questioning skills. As we do so, here are some questions to consider:
• Does our body language reflect good listening skills?
• Do we carefully observe the body language and voice tone of those with whom we speak?
• Do we remember that good listening skills include the use of questions, key word encouragers, paraphrases, and summaries? This allows us to clarify the information and make sure we understand the matter accurately. It will also assure others that we have heard them.
• Are we speaking with all the people who are involved?
• Are there other people who are also giving advice?
• Are there some cultural or ethnic issues that are a part of the situation?
• Do we understand these cultural or ethnic issues and how they may be affecting the people involved?

Understand emotions

Some emotions are positive (joy, excitement) and others are negative (bitterness, hatred). It is one thing to note how a person is feeling. It is another thing to understand why the person feels that way. Why is a person happy or sad or angry or frustrated or annoyed? Are health issues, including mental health issues, affecting the person’s emotions? Is he or she getting enough sleep, exercise, relaxation, and proper nutrition?

It is also important for us as pastors to understand when and how our personal emotions are affected by a particular case. Perhaps our parents divorced when we were young and now we see that same thing happening in a marriage in the congregation. Maybe a member questions why the church is not growing. It is difficult for us to avoid negative emotions at a time like that and not to take the comments personally.

Questions to consider:
• Are we affected emotionally by this issue?
• Are our emotions affecting our judgment at the moment?

*In The Skilled Helper, Gerard Egan teaches positive body language with the acronym SOLER: Squared (facing the person), Open (without arms or legs crossed), Leaned (forward or at least upright as opposed to leaning backward), Eye contact (not glaring but not distracted), and Relaxed (not fidgeting, etc.). These apply to the Euro-American culture and often need to be adapted when working with those of different ethnic backgrounds.
Identify issue

On both a congregational and personal level, situations can be complex. Several issues may be involved and one factor is affecting another. Often it is tempting to try to resolve all the issues at once. Rarely is that possible or wise.

As we pastors ponder a particular situation, we have to consider which key issue, or issues, needs to be addressed. Allowing ourselves to get sidetracked by peripheral matters only complicates the situation and delays a God-pleasing solution.

When identifying the issue, timing is also important. Problems have risen in the church not because leaders did the wrong thing but because they didn't understand the importance of timing—knowing when and how to approach a matter. Perhaps speaking to someone after a worship service is not the best time. Pondering the matter for a few days may give us or the other person a better perspective on the matter.

Questions to consider:
- What is the key issue in this case?
- Are there a number of separate but related issues?
- Is a surface issue merely a symptom of a deeper core matter that needs to be addressed?
- If there are a number of issues, which one should we handle first?
- Do we listen for a theme as we speak with people? This helps us understand the message behind the message.

Desire input

This point is different from the “Gather information” stage. Here we are not only trying to understand what the problem is but also how to handle it. We are doing so with the understanding that “two heads are better than one.” Proverbs 18:15 (NIV84) states, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” Perhaps a
fellow pastor has dealt with a similar situation. Maybe a church leader has a read on a fellow member that we don't have. Early on in my pastoral ministry, the president of our congregation pulled me aside and offered me some advice in a particular case in the congregation. His insights gave me a different perspective on the situation, a more accurate view than I previously had. I didn’t specifically seek his input, but it was helpful when he offered it. It also demonstrated to me that the input of others is valuable.

While getting input is important for the young pastor, even the seasoned pastor benefits from the advice of others. How tragic it is to watch the ministry of a veteran pastor crash and burn due to poor judgment on his part. If only he had kept in closer contact with his brothers and sought their advice.

It is also important to seek the advice of godly people who have some world experience. Consider the example of Solomon’s son Rehoboam. He rejected the advice of his father's elders and foolishly followed the advice of “the young men who had grown up with him” (1 Ki 12:8). The result was that Israel and Judah became a divided kingdom.

Questions to consider:

- Have we consulted with appropriate congregational leaders?
- Have we listened to the advice of Christian brothers and sisters in the ministry?
- Have we consulted with others that we respect?

Evaluate which principles apply and how

Often a number of principles pertain to a matter. As pastors, we have to think through all of them. Consider the simple case of whether or not to have a beer with supper. The principle of Christian freedom allows us to have or not have a beer. But then there is the principle of avoiding offense. The principle of caring for our bodies could also be a factor if we are experiencing certain health problems. Or maybe our doctor has recommended an occasional glass of beer or wine for health reasons.

Before we can apply a principle of Scripture, we have to identify it clearly and recognize the biblical basis for the principle and what it does or does not mean. Regardless of the circumstances that we face, certain principles of Scripture always pertain. Paul told Timothy that through Scripture “the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Ti 3:17 NIV84). God's Word always gives the tools needed to get the job done.
But while Scripture equips us for the task at hand, it does not spell out a course of action. That is often left to our Christian judgment. And such judgment, though enlightened by the Word of God, is neither perfect nor exact. Two Christians may face similar situations. Both are good listeners. Both understand how emotions can play a part in the matter. Both are searching the Scriptures and desiring the input of brothers and sisters in the faith. Yet one may choose one course of action and the other something different. This does not mean that one is wise and the other foolish or that one is right and the other wrong. Nor does it mean that all truth is relative and that right and wrong or wisdom and folly can never be discerned. It simply means that pastoral theology has some gray areas. A wise leader will allow gray to remain gray when God’s Word lets it remain gray.

Questions to consider:
- Which biblical principles address the issue?
- Are we clearly distinguishing between a biblical principle and a human or personal preference?
- Are we clearly distinguishing between a biblical principle and an application?
- Are we applying the biblical principles consistently?
- Are we applying the biblical principles faithfully?
- Are we applying the biblical principles evangelically?

Apply the G.U.I.D.E.

Now that we have explained the Pastoral Theology G.U.I.D.E., let’s apply it to some sample cases.

Case study: On a hospital call, you are visiting a member who had a stroke. The family members aren’t sure what medical care is appropriate. Should they take a wait-and-see approach or pursue a more aggressive form of treatment?

Gather information
- What is the prognosis?
- How severe was the stroke?
- How much brain damage occurred?
- How long have they been treating the patient?
• What are some of the treatments they have tried?
• How old is the patient?
• Does the person have other medical problems?
• Are the family members weak or strong Christians?
• Are some family members non-Christians? If so, what is their religious background?

Understand emotions
• How sudden and unexpected was this health crisis?
• What role does the patient have in the family?
• Does the patient have good relationships with the other family members?
• How emotional are the various family members?
• Have other loved ones died recently?
• Have we had a similar situation in our own lives that may be affecting our emotions at the moment?

Identify issue
• Are the family members looking for advice on appropriate medical care or are they expressing concern or anxiety over a family crisis?
• Is prolonged care for the family member a major concern?
• Do family members disagree on a course of action?

Desire input
• What do the doctors and medical staff recommend?
• What do other pastors or church leaders feel is an appropriate course of action?

Evaluate which biblical principles apply and how
• Biblical principles to consider:
  ◦ God is the one who gives and withdraws the gift of life (Dt 32:39).
  ◦ All human life is sacred (Ge 9:6; Ro 5:8).
  ◦ God makes us stewards of our lives and the lives of others (Ge 4:9; 1 Co 6:19,20).
God not only looks at what we do but why we do it—our motives (Pr 16:1,2).

• In applying these principles we have to ask:
  ° Is God seeking to prolong this life, or is God about to call this life home to himself in heaven?
  ° Are family members seeking to glorify God with their actions?
  ° Do family members understand the biblical principles, or do we need to gently and patiently guide them toward a God-pleasing course of action?

Summary comments: This case study illustrates that biblical principles apply to a situation that is not black and white. God’s Word does not tell us what the family members should do, but it does give them principles that can shape their thoughts and guide them as they strive toward a God-pleasing approach to medical care. The Word also demonstrates that the issue is not “What do I want?” or “What does the family want?” or “What would Mom or Dad want?” The focus is on God: “What would the Lord want me to do in this matter? How can I glorify him in this situation?”

**Case study:** A woman in your congregation is concerned because her grandchildren are not baptized. She says the parents (her son and his wife), who are not members of your church, are opposed to Baptism, and she wants to know if you will baptize her grandchildren privately.

**Gather information**

• How does she know that her son and his wife are opposed to Baptism?
• Has she discussed this matter with them?
• Has she asked if she could have her grandchildren baptized?
• Are her son and his wife unchurched, or do they attend a church that rejects infant Baptism?

**Understand emotions**

• It is painful for her to have grandchildren that are not baptized.
• It also hurts that her son and his wife see no need for Baptism.
• She cares deeply about her grandchildren, including their spiritual lives.
• Are we acknowledging the concern that she has for her grandchildren?

Identify issue
• Is she communicating her concerns to her son and daughter-in-law?
• Is the real issue Baptism or sharing Jesus Christ with her grandchildren?

Desire input
• What do the elders of the congregation know about the son and his wife?
• Have other pastors whose advice you respect faced a similar situation?

Evaluate which biblical principles apply and how
• Biblical principles to consider:
  ◦ We do not force the means of grace on those who refuse it (Mt 7:6).
  ◦ Parents are responsible for the spiritual lives of their children (Eph 6:4).
  ◦ Baptism is a means of grace that works and strengthens faith (Ac 2:38; Ac 22:16; Gal 3:27; 1 Pe 3:21).
  ◦ The good news about Jesus Christ is also found in God’s Word (Jn 20:31).
• In applying these principles, we have to consider:
  ◦ Is it right to baptize children against the will of their parents?
  ◦ While she may not be able to baptize her grandchildren, she can share the Word of God with them as they grow older.

Summary comments: This case illustrates that it is important to clarify the issue. Her concern to have her grandchildren baptized is good, but it is part of a larger picture—the spiritual welfare of her grandchildren. Rather than focusing just on Baptism (which may or may not be possible depending on the children’s parents), we can help her accomplish the real goal—leading her grandchildren to Christ.
Broad principles in pastoral theology

As we apply God’s Word to pastoral ministry, it is also helpful to consider some broad principles of Scripture that apply to pastoral theology. These hermeneutical principles shape the way we apply the principles of God’s Word in a particular situation.

The Biblical Middle Road Principle

The first one we call the Biblical Middle Road Principle. With this principle we are not advocating a moderate approach to theology that is either conservative or lax. Rather, we seek to be faithful to the Bible by avoiding the extremes.

When driving down a road, it is important to avoid the shoulder on one side or the other. This is also true as we apply scriptural truth. Like ditches, there are extremes that we need to avoid. The apostle Paul sets forth this principle in 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV84): “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” A key word in this passage is the Greek word ὀρθοτιμεῖω, which the NIV translates “correctly handles.” One challenge in understanding this word is that this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. However, the Septuagint uses it twice, in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5. In these verses it is used for the Hebrew word יָשָׁר ("be smooth, straight, right"). Many lexicons and commentaries translate this word as “cutting a straight path” or “keeping to a correct course.” In the context of this passage, the idea...
of keeping to a straight course is then applied to how the “workman” handles God’s Word. This is reflected in various, though similar, ways in the translations.\textsuperscript{11} By keeping to a straight course, he then becomes δόκιμος, that is, “one approved.”

One way in which we cut a straight course is to avoid the extremes (ditches). Consider Figure 1.1, which illustrates this principle. An evangelical ministry involves applying the law and the gospel. These are the two lanes on the road where we must travel. But on either side of these lanes are extremes, ditches we need to avoid. Along the “law lane” is the ditch of legalism. In a simple sense, legalism uses the law to accomplish the gospel’s work. On the other hand, laxness often applies a “God is love” theology that borders on antinomianism. Both of these ditches are dangerous because they fail to handle the Word of Truth correctly.

While both ditches pose a threat to our ministry, legalism is probably the greater threat for us as conservative, Bible-believing pastors. More will be said on the matter of legalism below.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Figure 1.1}
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- \textbf{Laxness}

- \textbf{Gospel}

- \textbf{Law}

- \textbf{Legalism}

the near-literal sense ‘divide’ (A.V.) is debatable. In a composite verb the meaning-emphasis may shift to the prefix, until in the semantic process the literal sense of the base is lost. Thus straight-cutting begins to mean straight-handling, handling aright. It is not so strange that, by an easy transition from the physical to the moral sphere, some such notion as ‘cutting a straight road or path’ led in the course of time to the exclusively moral use of the term.”\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} A sample of the various Bible translations is as follows: NIV84/NIV2011—“correctly handles the word of truth”; KJV/NKJV—“rightly dividing the word of truth”; NASB—“accurately handling the word of truth”; RSV—“rightly handling the word of truth”; NRSV—“rightly explaining the word of truth”; Beck—“teaches the word of truth in the
The Scriptural Scale Principle

As we cut a straight path and correctly handle the truth of God’s Word, the issue may not be that we avoid the extremes but that we balance these two truths of Scripture. This we call the Scriptural Scale Principle. (See Figure 1.2.) Rather than seeing these two truths of Scripture as contradictory, we simple balance them on either side of the scale and allow them to stand side by side.

This is true with the two main teachings of Scripture: law and gospel. They contradict each other in many ways: the law condemns/the gospel saves; the law demands/the gospel promises. As we carry out an evangelical ministry, we have to allow these two teachings to stand side by side. At the same time, we realize that Scripture clearly tips the scale in favor of the gospel. “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Ro 5:20).

Another example is the doctrines of divine providence and human contingency. Setting forth the doctrine of divine providence, Scripture teaches that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Ps 139:16). It also teaches that what we do in our lives can have an effect on the length of our lives (Isa 38:1-5). This we call human contingency. Rather than trying to reason out these two seemingly contradictory statements, we have to apply the Scriptural Scale Principle. In pastoral ministry we comfort people with the truth that God is in control of our lives. Yet when people are tempted to take a fatalistic approach toward their lives or the lives of their loved ones, we remind them that God has made us stewards of our lives and the lives of our loved ones. What we do makes a difference in God’s governance of this world.

Figure 1.2

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<tr>
<th>Divine Providence</th>
<th>Human Contingency</th>
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right way”; GWN—“teaches the word of truth in the right way”; Luther—“der da recht theile das Wort der Wahrheit”; Revised Luther—“der da recht austeilt das Wort der Wahrheit”; NVI—“que interpreta rectamente la palabra de verdad”; Versión Reina-Valera 1995—“que usa bien la palabra de verdad.”
Earlier we spoke about the need to avoid legalism in our ministry. But what does that mean? What is legalism?

In simple terms, legalism is using the law to do the gospel’s work. Let us explore three basic ways this can be done. The first falls into the area of justification. This form of legalism is a synonym for work-righteousness. When we encourage salvation by works, we are guilty of legalism. The second way we use legalism is in the area of sanctification. When we seek to motivate a Christian to do good works with the law rather than the gospel, we are guilty of legalism. Finally, legalism can also refer to an unchristian, judgmental attitude. We have our own personal view of what a Christian should be like, and because a fellow Christian does not measure up to this standard, we look down on him or her. A connection sometimes exists between the second and third usages of this word, but not always.

We need to avoid all forms of legalism. But of the three, the second and third would seem to be where we struggle most in pastoral ministry. It is tempting for a pastor, especially in the early years of his ministry, to use the law to motivate his members into action. There is no doubt that the law plays a part in shaping and controlling human behavior. It keeps the sinful nature in check. It pulls, pushes, and drags him into the cart, where he is forced to go along for the ride even though he puts up a protest and kicks and screams the whole time. While the threats and discipline of the law have their place in the Christian life, we usually do not say that the law motivates us to live a Christian life. When it comes to doing good works and living lives pleasing to God, only the gospel can produce God-pleasing actions. Christ’s love compels our new man into action, even as the old man is beaten into submission by God’s law. Legalism enters the picture when the law is directed at the Christian, including his new man, with the hope of bringing about a God-pleasing action.

---Pastoral Point to Ponder---
Every pastor must fight against legalism. This is particularly true for the young pastor. He wants to prove himself. He wants to see results. The gospel doesn’t seem to work fast enough, so he ends up using the law to do the gospel’s work. That’s legalism.

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12The Formula of Concord (SD VI:21) states that the old man is “like a stubborn, recalcitrant donkey . . . [he] needs to be forced into obedience to Christ not only through the law’s teaching, admonition, compulsion, and threat but also often with the cudgel of punishments.” The Book of Concord, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), p. 591.
Closely related to this misapplication of law and gospel is the critical attitude that judges people according to our own personal standard. This is pietism. We imagine how a member should live, and we become impatient, maybe even accusatory, when people fail to measure up. This can happen when we judge negatively the actions of Christian brothers and sisters even though they fall into the area of Christian freedom. Equally dangerous is judging their motives for such actions. Often our basis for this unchristian judgment is not God’s law but our own laws (e.g., “that’s not the right way to do ministry”) or church policies (e.g., “we only marry members”). God gives us the freedom to establish guidelines that help us conduct our ministry “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Co 14:40). However, if we use these laws—human or divine—rather than the gospel to prepare God’s people for works of service, then the body of Christ is not built up.

Certainly there is always room for constructive criticism. Conducting an evangelical ministry means that we offer encouragement and correction to others, including Christian brothers and sisters in the ministry, in a way that edifies the body of Christ. Often it is helpful to approach such a matter by asking for clarification rather than offering criticism. What we perceive as helpful comments may flow from confusion or misunderstanding. Shooting first and asking questions later usually does not work well in law enforcement. It is even less helpful in the Christian church.

Just as there is value in giving loving comments to others, so there is also value in receiving encouragement and correction in a spirit of Christian love. Remember that the person cares enough to confront us. This give-and-take between the members of the ministerium can have a positive effect. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” is the prayer the psalm writer offered (Ps 133:1 NIV84). “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” was the instruction Paul gave the Ephesians (Eph 4:3). Both of these passages apply to pastors and laity alike.

The wounds of war are never pleasant. They become even more tragic when they are the result of friendly fire. Satan tries hard to get members of God’s church to attack one another. That makes his job much easier. As brothers and sisters in the faith, it is important to remember who the enemy is. It is true that we all battle against our sinful nature. That is why we need the ministry of the keys in our midst. Yet as Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, “Our [ultimate] struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the
heavenly realms.” Our enemy is not the brother whose approach to min-istry is different from ours and who is willing to try something new. Nor is it the colleague who offers a word of caution in a spirit of love. Iron sharpens iron. Both brothers are a blessing to God’s church. Each can benefit from the other. This can only happen if they see each other as the coworkers that they are. Together they can work at defeating the common enemy—Satan. He not only sows weeds among the wheat but also suspicion and disharmony among the brothers. As Paul told the Corinthian Christians, Satan wants to outwit us (2 Co 2:11). Be aware of his schemes.

**Messy ministry/messy ministers**

Ministry is messy. The saints we serve are also sinners, and the sins they commit can make a mess. This shouldn’t surprise us. Nor should we be afraid to get our hands dirty. As spiritual physicians, we need to slip on our surgical gloves, open our biblical black bag, and do our best to stitch things back together. This is what the Great Physician did. He wasn’t afraid to roll up his sleeves and sink his hands into the soil of sinful lives. He entered the messy world of sexual sin, greed, ignorance, and arrogance. Jesus did not hesitate to meet sinners in their sinful world. Jesus knows how messy ministry can be.

Sometimes we add to the messiness. Instead of cleaning up messes in people’s lives, we only add to the messiness. We make mistakes in the ministry. We fail to apply law and gospel correctly. We fall into legalism and struggle against laxness. The accuser Satan daily reminds us of the real sins we have committed, the real errors in judgment we have made, and the real times when we have lacked the integrity demanded of a doctor of souls. Soon the storm clouds gather and the outlook for our ministry seems gloomy.

During these dark days of the soul, we find comfort in the light of Christ. This is what we preach to our people. Pity if we do not apply it to ourselves. Our sin is real—but so is the gospel. Our transgressions are great—but Christ is greater. Sin has increased in our lives—but grace increases all the more. We are washed; we are sanctified; we are

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**Pastoral Point to Ponder**

“This life is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal, but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.” (Martin Luther, LW 32:24)
justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He makes us competent as ministers of the new covenant. He makes us the spiritual physicians that we are. He forgives us when we fail. He comforts us when we grieve.

When you make a mistake in the ministry, admit it. If you need to apologize to someone, do it. Most of all, place your sin at the feet of him whose sin-scarred hands still show the stains of our messy ministry mistakes. He died for those sins also.

There are two prayers I offer every day in my ministry. First I pray, “Lord, do not ever let me do anything that would discredit your name and the ministry you have given me.” It is an awesome office God gives us. He entrusts to us the care of souls through the public proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

The second prayer I offer daily are the words of Christ: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Mt 16:23 NIV84). I need both of these prayers. With the first I ask the Lord to keep me from sin. With the second I remember his forgiveness for those times I have failed. In the context of Matthew 16, Peter—and Satan—was trying to interfere with God’s gospel plan. Satan does the same today when he accuses us of being guilty of sin after we have been forgiven. The accuser’s voice is strong in the pastor’s mind. We know what sin is. We have studied it in every detail in the classroom, exegetically and doctrinally, as well as in our personal meditation. Satan works hard to abuse this knowledge. He tries to blind us to “the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Co 4:4). The apostle Paul lets this light shine brightly in Romans 8:33: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” Brothers, not even demons can separate us from God’s love. Remember that truth when you are struggling against Satan’s accusations. Christ’s forgiveness also applies to the doctor of souls. Jesus’ blood also cleanses the pastor from his ministry mistakes.

Lord God, you have appointed me as an overseer and pastor in your church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument. But do not forsake me, for if ever I
should be on my own, I would easily destroy it all. (Martin Luther, *Sacristy Prayer*)

Summary

The art of pastoral theology involves applying the principles of Scripture to the daily tasks of pastoral ministry. To accomplish this, we need a “heart to hear” so that we diagnose a problem accurately. Together with this ability to listen and discern, we also need a God-given knowledge of Scripture and a Spirit-given wisdom to apply it.

The Pastoral Theology G.U.I.D.E. is a practical tool that can help us in our ministry. It disciplines us to (1) gather the necessary information, (2) understand the emotions that may be involved, (3) identify the key issue, (4) desire the input of others, and (5) evaluate how we can apply the principles of Scripture in each particular case.

Some key hermeneutical principles are also important in pastoral theology. The Biblical Middle Road Principle helps us avoid the extremes that lead us away from the truth of Scripture. The Scriptural Scale Principle encourages us to balance those doctrines that God’s Word allows to stand side by side.

As pastors, we need to guard against legalism, which uses the law to do the gospel’s work. This warning is pertinent for the young pastor who has the knowledge and zeal to serve God’s people but may lack the sanctified wisdom that God’s Spirit gives in the school of experience. All pastors need to fight against a judgmental attitude toward their brothers and sisters in the preaching and teaching ministry. Both the one who is willing to try something new and the one who voices a word of caution can be blessings to God’s church when they see each other as coworkers rather than enemies.

While we strive for excellence in this life, we will never reach perfection in our lives or our ministries. Satan will use our sins and imperfections, including our ministry mistakes, to lead us to despair. Through the gospel, God assures us that our sins are forgiven, including those sins we commit as we carry out the office of the pastoral ministry.

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For further reading


