

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES TITLE: CHURCH ATTENDANCE | SERMON TITLE: PASTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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Would you like to know the biggest difference between a pastor and a Christian? Here it is: On the last day, the Christian only has to give one account. The pastor has to give two.

Did you know you have to give an account, an explanation for yourself on the last day? Listen:

Romans 14:12 So then ^aeach one of us will give an account of himself to God.

What sort of accounting do you think this is? Let me suggest a parallel:

Luke 16:2 "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

The manager was responsible for something; he was called before his master to account for that something over which he was manager. That's what it means to be responsible: You are the one who's going to have to explain yourself if there's a problem with the thing you are responsible for.

So, you are responsible for your self as a creature of God. God has given you the management, and thus the accountability, for a self, namely, yourself. That's a sacred trust; a human self is an exceedingly valuable object; as far as I know, the only thing more valuable in the whole universe is God himself. So it's a grave thing to have responsibility for your self.

In the end, therefore, you will have to give an accounting for your management of your self, just like the unrighteous steward did.

Now I started by making a distinction: As a Christian you need only give one such accounting; the pastor, I'm afraid, has to give two. One for himself, since he also is manager over himself, and another account for those he pastored.

Now this is a sobering thought. This is what led one puritan to remark to the pastor who longs to have a larger congregation, that when it comes time to give account for his management of souls, he will think his church was plenty large enough.

Pastors are responsible before God for the souls which they pastor. This is a good thing designed by God. This is what pastors are for. This is the way things should be.

Now how do you suppose pastors are chiefly to exercise such care of souls? What means do they use to do this pastoring, which they will give account for? To keep things simple, I think the primary means of pastoring is preaching the Bible.

This preaching happens both in public and in private; in private when pastors counsel their people; in public when pastors preach from the pulpit. Now private visitation is rarer than weekly public preaching, therefore I say the primary means by which pastors care for the souls of their people is through public preaching and teaching.

Think for a moment of a literal shepherd, a man on a mountainside with sheep. What means does he use to care for the sheep? Rod and staff, water and grass, and a sheep pen, among other things. Now think of the Christian pastor: His chief means for shepherding is the regular, public teaching of God's Word. That's how his job is done, for the most part.

This is another way to say what I've told you before: The purpose of preaching is pastoring. Some men become pastors so they can preach; they love to be the guy in the spotlight; they are convinced they have so many important things to say, and really, they need to be heard. This is a complete mistake. Beware the man who pastors so he can preach.

Rather, seek the man who preaches so he can pastor. This man may not particularly like public speaking, or even private speaking for that matter. But he loves the God of the

Bible and the Bible of God; and loving God, he has concern for what is precious to God, namely, God's people. And preaching affords an occasion to say some things to them all at once, that they may be built up, warned, encouraged, instructed, and Gospelized. This man preaches to keep the people on the path to the Kingdom of God. With all this in mind, let me read the sentence to you again:

Hebrews 13:17 ¹⁷ ^aObey your leaders and submit *to them*, for ^bthey keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. ¹Let them do this with joy and not ²with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

At this point someone is thinking "I thought we were talking about church attendance?" We are talking about church attendance. And today I offer my last argument as to why you need to attend our three basic meetings as often as possible: Because God's will is that you be pastored. And that pastoring comes chiefly through Bible preaching.

In other words, to the degree that you willingly neglect church, you are refusing God's will for you to be pastored. That's a problem in itself, between You and God.

But it's also a problem between You and the pastors of this church. Let me be very plain: I am willing to give account for those I preach to; I wouldn't be a pastor if I were not willing. But I am not willing to give account for those who will not attend seriously to the preaching. I am not willing to give account for those who treat church attendance with disregard. And I trust any other pastor of this church, past or future, would be of the same mind. Let's look at this a little deeper:

James 3:1 ^aLet not many *of you* become teachers, ^bmy brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a ¹stricter judgment.

I think James is on the same track here as the Hebrews text. Leaders lead by teaching. That teaching puts the teacher at risk; if they fail in their task to guide God's people into truth, there are real consequences. By preaching this sermon to you today, by presuming to be a teacher of the assembly of God's people, I have put myself at risk; and my purpose is your benefit. It's the same for Jimmy or Henry or anyone else.

Our judgment will be stricter and harder. What *you* get away with, *I* will not get away with. More will be expected of me; the questions will be harder and less forgiving, etc. That's the position a pastor places himself in.

And it doesn't bother me. I do it gladly. But I refuse to be responsible for people who won't attend church regularly. And really, it's common sense.

Think for a moment of your personal physician. Maybe you have a good doctor you trust; maybe you've had him for years.

Now imagine that you ask your doctor sign an agreement which makes him liable for your health. Suppose he consents and signs the agreement. Now how would he like it if you started missing your regular check-up's? Would he put up with it? Do you think he would continue to consider himself liable for your health? I tell you he would insist on a clause in the agreement which states that if you won't come for regular check-up's he will be released from liability concerning your health.

It's just the same in church. Doctors are concerned for your body; pastors for your soul. No serious pastor will consent to be liable for the soul of someone who will not take his directions. And regular attendance is basic to those directions.

Let's take a few examples from Jesus of this idea of pastoral accountability:

John 21:15-17 ¹⁵ So when they had ^afinished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you ^blove Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I ²love You." He said to him, "Tend ^cMy lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you ¹love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I ²love You." He said to him, "^aShepherd My sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you ¹love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him ^athe third time, "Do you ¹love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, ^bYou know all things; You know that I ¹love You." Jesus said to him, "^cTend My sheep.

What we have here is the pastor's motivation. Peter, and all shepherds, should care for Jesus' sheep because they love Jesus. Now this is actually more important than it may

seem at first glance. It's similar to the fundamental reason a man should love his wife, or the wife should submit to her husband: They should both do it *first* for the love of God. Of course we hope they love each other, too, but that cannot be the ground of their obedience.

The pastor who cares for Christians for some other reason more than his love for Christ has a problem. Love for God is the chief motivation.

But the irregular attender actually hinders this process. Christ loves his sheep, and so he takes some of his sheep and gives them a shepherd's staff. He makes them into shepherd-sheep. And he charges them with the task of looking after the other sheep. That was Peter's case; that is the case with every true pastor. When a Christian is lax in church attendance they hinder this process. The love of Christ toward them is practically spurned; the shepherd-sheep who is responsible for them can't do his job. It creates a real problem.

Now if Jesus were here, he would do something about it himself. I know this for a fact. You know how I know? Because when the Father gave men to Jesus to protect and care for, Jesus did it diligently and we even see Jesus giving a sort of brief accounting for them before he is arrested:

John 17:11-12 ¹¹ "I am no longer in the world; and *yet* ^athey themselves are in the world, and ^bI come to You. ^cHoly Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* ^dwhich You have given Me, that ^ethey may be one even as *We are*. ¹² "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name ^awhich You have given Me; and I guarded them and ^bnot one of them perished but ^cthe ¹son of perdition, so that the ^dScripture would be fulfilled.

Jesus guarded his 12 while he was with them. None were lost, save one. Now is that a problem? Is Jesus in trouble with God for losing that one? No, because Jesus has a justifiable reason for losing him: Judas was a son of perdition and Scripture predicted that he would be damned so that atonement for sin could be made.

You see how Jesus accounts for his men? You see how he explains why one was lost? He makes clear it wasn't his negligence; Jesus is a diligent pastor.

And so I trust if Jesus were here, and he saw you were absenting yourself from church, he would go after you and confront you. He would clear up the situation. The whole thing would either result in your repentance or your expulsion from his community. Jesus wouldn't leave it alone; he loves you too much for that.

And I love Him, so I won't leave it alone, either. That's why I've spent a month addressing attendance. If we have some folks here who end up lost, I intend it to be because they are sons of perdition, not because I am a negligent shepherd.

Conclusion to Series

So, here at the end of this series, it's time for me to make plain the expectations of members. Plainly, it is the expectation of the leadership and membership of this church, that from now on all members will be careful to attend church as often as possible. Of course this doesn't apply to sickness, occasional travel, having babies, legitimate work, or various other justifiable absences.

Many of you come from baptist backgrounds. You are all familiar with the typical phenomena of a 500 member church with 30 in regular attendance. Need I say we shall not be such a church? There is no category in this church for a member who does not attend as regularly as possible. There are two options: Either you are a member who attends as regularly as possible or else you are a visitor. If you are presently a member who has no intention of attending as regularly as possible, it's time for you to move from member to visitor. This church will only accept as members those who live committed, Christian lives.

Also, I probably need to admit negligence at this point. I have been concerned about this issue in our church for some time, and have planned to preach this series, but I held off for a time. Possibly I held off too long and the Lord is displeased with me. If so, I gladly confess and repent. Be that as it may, I have now said what I need to say.

What this means is that from this point, persistent, unjustifiable absences will result in a visit from elders and deacons. My hope is that no such visit will be needed; that we will all take these sermons to heart and submit to be pastored by them.

I would also like to ask you all to be considerate that when you are going to miss a meeting you let someone know. To some this may sound extreme; if so, I disagree with you completely. Part of our job is to watch your spiritual life. If we know you are gone for a good reason, we know your absence doesn't reveal a problem which needs to be addressed. If there is not a good reason, we know there is a problem and we can do something about it, as God has tasked us with doing.

Some of you already do this, and I appreciate it very much. You can contact any elder or deacon, former elders in the church, wives of elders or deacons, or someone who will let us know you are sick and not simply sinful.

Gospel

I know it's hard being a sinner, because I'm one. If this sermon has exposed your sin, I ask you to respond like a Christian, not like a proud unbeliever. The proud infidel hardens his heart and resists the conviction of sin; he ignores the counsel; he will not submit to the cure. Please don't respond like a proud infidel.

Respond like a Christian. The Christian hears the preacher attentively and humbly, sees his sin exposed to the light, and he turns to Christ as his sacrifice. Jesus was put to death so God's people, who, sometimes, sin by despising church, may be forgiven. God doesn't reject us for this sin because we are his and the Blood of His Lamb covers us.

Christian, if this is you, you are a church despiser. You need Blood. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. But good news, blood has been shed.

Now, in the name of that Blood, repent of your sin. And bear fruit worthy of repentance. Refresh your devotion to Jesus by refreshing your devotion to his church.