

# Our Relationship to God, The Pastor and the Church

A message for  
First Baptist Church of Perry

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For the last couple of months, God has really been burdening my heart with the thoughts I am going to share with you today. The Holy Spirit has revealed to me some important concepts that I believe that we all need to understand as we move toward calling our next pastor here at FBC. Thank you all, (congregation) and thank you Pastor Wayne, Ben & choir, for giving me the time and the opportunity this morning to share this with you today. This is not something that I want to do, I would much rather sit out there and listen to someone deliver these words, but it is something the Holy Spirit is compelling me to do, and He is not going to let have any peace about it until I share this message.

Before anyone gets any ideas to the contrary, you need to know that my remarks today come solely from God through my heart via the Holy Spirit and from no other person, not Wayne Edwards, or anyone else. After God had begin to burden my heart with this message, I asked Pastor Wayne for an opportunity to share it with the men attending the Prayer retreat in late January, but he had no idea what I was going to say. After hearing it then, he asked me to share it with the entire congregation, and I reluctantly agreed, only because God has continued to burden my heart about sharing it with you.

I have also shared the content of my remarks with the Pastor Search Team, and they have unanimously supported my decision to share them with you. All of us on the team believe that this church's collective understanding of God's truths about the issues I will talk about today are vitally important to the success of the calling and leadership of our next Pastor.

## **Content of the Message**

My message is about self-examination and expectations; the expectations that we should have regarding our church membership and our relationship with our pastors, and much more importantly, about God's expectations of us as his children. But above all else, my message to you today is a call to earnest and fervent prayer by all of us, the whole body, as we seek to bring God's chosen pastor to FBC. The point of my remarks is NOT about the leadership of Wayne Edwards, or Rick Parker, or any of our other former pastors, although our relationships with them and how we have responded to their leadership are part of this discussion relevant this message. The true focus of the message is US, the body of members of FBC. My intent in speaking to you today is to inform you, encourage you, and exhort you to fervent prayer for the future of this church, because I love this church, which is to say, and I love you, the people of this body, who have loved me and my family.

Many, many, Southern Baptist churches today, probably a majority of them are facing various struggles, just as we have been. We are not alone. In fact many of them have more severe issues that we face here, but that is no reason to pretend we don't have some serious problems that we need to face.

Every concept I will share with you this morning is based on scripture from God's Word, although I will also share the comments of some Godly Christian authors who have written about these issues. I trust you will accept them all as the TRUTH, as God reveals it to all of us.

## **Looking in the Spiritual Mirror & Self-Assessment**

So let's talk about Self-examination and Expectations. As you can see, I have set up a mirror here as an illustration. What do we use a mirror for? (to examine ourselves) When we look in the mirror, what do we expect to see? The way we truly appear? Most of the time we use a mirror to assist us in altering our appearance to make us look better on the outside than we really are (nothing wrong with that). But I want you imagine this as a "spiritual" mirror, one that reflects our inner selves, as we truly are. What should we expect to see now? Will we even have the courage to look? What do we think God sees when he looks into us? What do we think God expects of us when we look at ourselves?

Understanding the honest answers to these questions is vital to having the proper biblical expectations for our relationship our next pastor, whoever he might be. In order to properly prepare itself for the pastor search process and the calling a new pastor, it is vitally important that a church conduct a thorough and honest self-assessment of the congregation's attitudes and behavior towards its leaders. One of the books we have used as a guide in the pastor search process is "*Seeking God to seek a Pastor*" by Dr. Gregory Frizzell, who preached to us here last October. In his book, one of the most important questions Dr. Frizzell urges us to ask and answer honestly for ourselves is:

***"Does your church have a healthy, biblical view of honoring the pastor as a spiritual leader, or more as temporary hired help? Do you view calling a pastor as a sacred union of love until "God do you part", or more as a temporary trial run we can end at will?"***

In order to honestly answer these questions, we must first understand what God expects of us as Christians, and as Church members. So let's take a look in the spiritual mirror and do some honest self-assessment.

### **Three Types of Members**

In most all of the current Southern Baptist churches in America, it can be said that most congregations consist of three types of church members. These three types are:

**Consumer members      Servant members   &      Seldom-seen members**

The seldom seen members group is self-explanatory. These are the members that show up on Easter Sunday, Christmas, and for their own funeral, and not much else. In older churches, they are the most numerous, but they rarely attend and do not participate in Sunday School or other church activities. Since today is not Easter, or Christmas and its not a funeral service, it is very unlikely that any of you here today are a seldom-seen member. Addressing the issue of the seldom seen members is something we are undertaking at FBC, but my comments today focus on the other two groups, the Servant members and the Consumer members.

## **Consumer Members**

What is a “consumer” member? Well, a “consumer member” is a regular attendee at services, and probably Sunday school as well, which is something they have in common with “Servant” members, but this is where their similarity ends. A consumer is a member whose focus is on what the church can do (and fails to do) for them. When they think of the church they attend, their attitude is that it is “MY” church. This is most often the way they speak of it as well, which reveals a misunderstanding of church “ownership”.

**Generally their attitude is such that they view the programs and ministry of the church as something:**

- 1) That someone else does;**
- 2) Which their titles and offerings pay for, and;**
- 3) Are intended for their benefit, so;**
- 4) Therefore they have a “right” to complain if they don’t like it.**

### **And they say things like:**

- 1) “I didn’t like that sermon” or “I don’t like the way he preaches.”**
- 2) “That music was too loud, (too modern or too traditional) for me.”**
- 3) “I just come to this church/Sunday school for the fellowship.”**
- 4) “I’m not getting fed spiritually.”**
- 5) “Why are they doing it that way?”**
- 6) “That’s not the way we used to do it.”**

Consumer members often view the church as **a place for their “spiritual” entertainment** or to receive a benefit of a particular ministry, and their focus is on “What will I get out of it?” (“What’s in it for ME?”)

A consumer member’s perspective on church is surrounded by the concepts of:

**I, ME, MY and MINE.** Whenever anything interferes with this focus, they get offended.

## **Consumer Members & Leadership Positions**

You might think that a consumer member could not be in a position of leadership within the church, since we use the word “serve” to describe being on a committee, etc. But this is not true. Unfortunately, many churches have “consumer” members that are elected or appointed to positions of leadership simply by virtue of them being well-known because they attend services regularly, or because they are perceived to be “spiritual” in spite of their inner attitude that focuses on themselves. Just being a member or even a chairperson of a committee or in a leadership position does not automatically make one a “servant” member.

## **Servant Members**

Contrast this view of the “consumer” member with that of “servant” members. They are also regular attendees usually more frequent than consumer members. But the primary difference is how they view the church. Their focus is directed outward towards others and not toward themselves.

In addition, they have a proper understanding of the “**ownership**” of the church. They speak of and think of the Church as being **God’s Church**, and not belonging to themselves or other members, no matter how much money they might contribute to the church coffers. This is a matter of attitude and scriptural and spiritual understanding, not of behavior or conduct. It first requires a **willingness to submit to God’s authority** over their own lives and also over the life of the church. To do this, they must be regenerate (born again) members.

Without going any further, I have no doubt that everyone here can easily guess which of these types of church members is biblical and which is not. For most of my life since I became a Christian, I have been a consumer member of this church. This is true for most of us. Furthermore, It is not uncommon for church members to move from being a consumer member to a servant member and back again, and so forth and so on during the life of their membership in a congregation as they mature as Christians, and then backslide, then reaffirm their faith, and grow spiritually, etc. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t always strive to become more of a servant and less of a consumer when it comes to church membership. As we shall see, God demands nothing less of us.

It is very important that we understand exactly what the Bible has to say about this concept of being a servant member of the church so that we have no misunderstanding of what God expects of us. To do that we need to first understand the basis of what it means to be a Christian, since servant members must be regenerate (born again) Christians. If you are NOT a Christian, then any church membership is meaningless. You may as well join a social club. So what does it really mean to be a Christian?

## **What it Means to be a Christian & a Disciple**

**A Christian is most simply defined as:**

- **“A follower of Christ” or**
- **“A person who exemplifies in his or her life the teachings of Jesus Christ”**

In this case, **“Exemplify” means to serve as an example of.**

So, to be a “Christian” means we serve as **a living example of the teachings of Christ.**

**We also commonly use the word Disciple to refer to a follower of Christ, because the word “disciple” literally means “follower”**

**A “disciple” is commonly defined as: one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another:**

We all know the story of how Jesus personally called his first 12 disciples to himself and asked them to follow him. (See Matthew 4)

### **The Great Commission**

After they followed him, physically and spiritually for three years, in His final words to those first disciples, he commanded them:

*<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

*<sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)*

So we know from both his actions and Commandments that Jesus himself called us to be His followers. Becoming a disciple of Christ is not something that people decide to do independent of Christ's bidding. Unlike a cult following, where people often decide to follow someone even without his knowledge or a call to do so, Christian disciples are always called by Christ to come and follow him. We cannot make a decision to become His disciple and follow Jesus independent of His call to us, and therefore **becoming a disciple of Christ means that we do it own His terms, and not our own**. We don't get to decide what being a disciple means or pick and choose which of his teachings we will follow. Oh, we might try to set down our own terms for following Him. but that is not being a true disciple of Christ, a true Christian.

So when we choose to become a Christian, we are accepting His call, not just to call ourselves Christians, **but to become a living example of his attitude and teachings, in both words and deeds.**

### **The ATTITUDE of CHRIST and HIS CALL TO SERVICE**

What is this attitude and words and deeds I am referring to? How exactly does Christ call upon us to live? First let's look at his attitude. What does the Bible say? The apostle Paul sums it up best for me in **Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

<sup>6</sup> **Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.**

<sup>8</sup> **And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death —  
even death on a cross!**

Jesus himself also taught us with words about being a humble servant: in **Matthew 20:25-28**:

*<sup>25</sup>Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

And in deeds, Christ taught his disciples the attitude of being a servant, most famously by demonstrating it to them through His washing of their feet. See John 13.

And of course there are many other examples of Christ's servant attitude through the Gospels.

There can be no question then, that first and foremost, God calls all of us that follow Christ to be SERVANTS. Just as much as the point of His DEATH on the cross was to be the sacrifice to satisfy our sin debt, the whole point of the LIFE of Christ was that we are to be servants to others and to God. If we are going to accept the gift of His death (sacrifice) as payment for our sins, then we must also accept the challenge of His LIFE, by following his example of service in how we live our lives. If we don't want to live that way, then we need to re-examine whether we should call ourselves a Christian in the first place.

### **How do we Become a SERVANT? (DENYING OURSELVES)**

What does it mean to be this kind of servant, how do we do this? What does the Bible say?

**Jesus teaches us again in Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV):**

*<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*

What does it mean to deny ourselves? That means whenever our personal desires are in conflict to God's commands and His will for us and His church, we must give up those desires, wants, preferences, and even our rights. It means putting God first, then considering others next and **then ourselves last**. This is contrary to the teaching of popular culture and our natural selves. Yet God calls us to do it if we are to be his children.

There can be no question then, that to be a servant member of his church, we are to be as Christ taught us, becoming servants not just in deeds, but as Paul says, to have the same attitude as Christ, putting God above all and all others ahead of ourselves. In order to be a servant member of His church, what we want or desire or even what we think may be rightfully ours must become no longer important. We must submit to what God desires and what benefits his Church and other people in it and around it instead of seeking what pleases us or what we think is best for "ME".

So many churches get bogged down in internal conflicts because they are full of consumer members who refuse to deny themselves. They may “serve” on committees, teach Sunday School, be Deacons or maybe even pastoring a congregation, but when their focus is only on what they think is best for themselves, then they are not true servant members of God’s church.

### **UNITY and PEACE**

As church members we are to also called to be unified in love (one body) and we are called to peace, as Paul teaches over and over again to every New Testament church. Here is one example from his letter to the Colossians:           **Colossians 3:12-15 (NIV)**

***<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.***

Churches are not to be operated with partisan politics the way our government operates to balance power. There is no need for us to be concerned with balancing the power of God, because He has ALL the power we are to completely submit to His authority. In the church there are not to be two sides taking aim at each other to see who will prevail, and the disruption and conflict that results. As church members we are called to peace, not to create conflict. The Bible commands us to all be on the same side, and there is only one side we can be on as a Christian. And that is God’s side. When church members split into factions and take sides over an issue, then both sides are we take become Satan’s side. The devil knows we cannot do God’s kingdom work when we are fighting with each other. We must be unified in purpose and in peace, one body, working together for God and his kingdom.

### **Summary of Servant Members Characteristics**

**To summarize, as Christians, we are called to be**

- **Servant members of his church,**
- **unified in one body,**
- **serving God and submitting to His authority,**
- **while denying ourselves**
- **with love and forgiveness for each other**
- **as we serve and worship together in peace**

Nowhere in the Bible are we called to be mere consumers of church programs and ministries. We are only called to service and sacrifice.

Does that mean that we as servant members are not to enjoy Godly preaching, teaching, listening to and participating in praising God in music and song. Are we not to enjoy the fellowship and fun of sharing time with fellow believers? Of course it does not mean anything of the sort! As his children, it should be nothing but pure joy to worship Him and to fellowship with other believers. In fact He specifically commands us to assemble together for those reasons. But these things we do, these programs, ministries, even worship, are not just benefits for being a church member, for their own sake. They have a specific purpose; to equip us to become better “servant members”. But when we allow those benefits to become our sole or primary purpose in being a member; or when we allow worship to become our spiritual entertainment, rather than our gift to God, then we have become “consumer members”.

A church that becomes full of nothing but consumers members will quickly suck all the life out of itself, and will die. But most churches, even troubled ones, have a contingent of servant members that keep things going, even though those members are in a decided minority. Most southern Baptist Church experts put this number at somewhere between 15-20 % of the members, leading to the common reference to the “20-80 principle” which describes how 20% of the members of an organization do 80% of the work.

It is probably unrealistic to expect that most churches will overcome this fundamental truth about the numbers of consumer members vs. servant members. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to understand where we stand and make a dedicated and sincere effort to stop simply consuming and to start becoming the servants that God commands us to be. To do otherwise is being disobedient to God.

### **SERVANT PASTORS; GOD’S GIFT TO HIS CHURCH**

All right then, with that background, let’s get to the primary concern of my remarks.

So if we are to be servant members, denying ourselves, what does that mean in regards to how we are to relate to our pastor?

Of course, a pastor is to be a servant, also. Nearly every writer in the New Testament, most of them pastors and missionaries, refers to himself as a servant of Christ.

So how are we, as Servant members supposed to relate to our Servant pastor? What does the Bible say? Let’s look at it.

First of all we must understand that the Bible teaches us that **pastors are a gift of God to his church.**

#### **Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)**

***<sup>11</sup> Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup> Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.***

The Bible makes it clear that Pastors serve God (and us) by preaching, teaching, ministering to the church members in order to prepare and equip us to become servants, ***so that we can do his work and build up the Church***. Don't miss that last phrase, "so that the church may be built up". It is not to be torn apart or diminished, and it is not to be allowed to stagnate and fade.

This passage reveals to us what 1) a pastor's work is: equipping God's people to do God's work, and 2) what His people's work is: building up the church, (making new disciples). It is not the pastor's job to build up the church all by himself, while we sit back in the pew or Sunday School class and "consume" the programs and ministries of the church for ourselves. It is OUR job, having been properly equipped by the pastor, to roll up our sleeves and get to work building up the church, under the pastor's leadership. If we are truly behaving as servant members, this should result in the edification and growth (building up) of the church. If this is not happening, it is good cause for serious self-examination.

### **How we are to TREAT a PASTOR      ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE**

So if a pastor is God's gift to us, how should we treat him?

The Bible also makes this very clear: Let's look at the scriptures:

#### **Psalm 105:15 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> ***"Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."***

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup>***Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. <sup>13</sup>Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.***

#### **1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup>***The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.***

#### **Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup>***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.***

These simple and straightforward verses make it very clear how we as servant members are commanded by God to relate to our pastors.

## Summary of the Biblical Church Member-Pastor Relationship

In our relationship with a pastor, we are commanded to:

- 1) First, do no harm to them;
- 2) Respect them;
- 3) Hold them in the Highest Regard in love;
- 4) Live in Peace with them;
- 5) Give them Double Honor;
- 6) Obey them and Submit to their Authority;
- 7) Make their work a joy by being obedient, and;
- 8) Not make their work a burden.

That is a pretty clearly understood picture of the biblical relationship between church member and pastor. But it is also as important for us to understand what the Bible does not say about these things. It does NOT say that we only have to do these things if we approve of what the pastor does or how he does them. And it certainly does not give us permission to stop doing these things if a pastor makes a mistake (or two, or three). To be sure, they have been gifted by God and they are God's gift to us, but they are still just men. We have no right to expect perfection from any man, even if he is our Pastor. When the Bible teaches us to support and encourage our fellow believers, and hold each other accountable in love, and to seek forgiveness, repentance, and restoration when we falter, well, that doesn't just apply to our fellow members in the pews. It applies to our pastors as well.

### Obedience, Submission and Authority

Now, if we are consumer members, concerned with our "rights" in "our" church, we are going to have a problem with that command to "Obey them and Submit to their Authority". **After all, "we hired him, we are paying him so he is our employee and he has to do what we want and how we want him to do it."** But friends, this attitude is unscriptural and disobedient to God (SIN). Remember, a Pastor is God's gift to us, and he is not our employee, he is our appointed shepherd, called by God, and accountable to God for his acts. The bible doesn't say, "Obey them and submit to their authority" only when you agree with them or feel like it. Listen to what Dr. Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and respected Southern Baptist writer says about Hebrews 13:17 in his book *Nine Marks of Healthy Church*:

***"[Biblical] Church membership is showing a committed love to particular leaders. Ephesians 4:11 teaches us that pastors are gifts that Christ gives to his church. Christians are to accept that gift by obeying those pastors. "Obedience" and submission are awkward words for sinners. By nature, we don't like them. We immediately think of abuses of authority. Abuse is widespread and at times terrible in its consequences. But such abuses do not de-legitimize authority itself. Satan's attack on God from the very beginning has been to tell humans that authority and love cannot go together. And his great proof is God's call for us to deny ourselves when our own desires contradict his commands."***

Church members should not allow themselves to be fooled by Satan's deception that they are justified to withhold their trust in a pastor's leadership and restrain his authority because of fear that he may abuse that authority. A pastor's authority over us is granted by God himself, and we have no right to restrict it. To be sure, we have been given the freedom to restrict it. God doesn't force his children into obedience. And many church members and churches do restrict and limit their pastor's authority. But they are falling victim to Satan's deception, that by rejecting God's authority, they can somehow improve their lives and the health of the church. They have presumed to know better than God. This is pure fallacy and a LIE. It is blasphemy and SIN. It is nothing more than a rejection of God Himself. Dear friends, if this is how we are thinking, woe be unto us. Do not forget: He is God; He is Holy, and perfect, and we are NOT.

### **The dangers of misunderstanding the Biblical model of the member-pastor relationship**

Listen carefully to these words of Dr. Frizzell, from his book: *"Releasing the Revival Flood – A Churchwide Journey to Unity and Fellowship"*:

***"One of the most dangerous hindrances in today's Church in the unscriptural treatment of God's servants! Make no mistake", a history of "being hard" on leaders [Pastors & Staff] is a strong indication of profound spiritual problems. Indeed little could be more unscriptural or detrimental to kingdom work. Virtually nothing brings greater shame to the name of Christ and His Church. Not only does unloving behavior devastate people in the church, it presents a horrible witness to the unchurched community."***

*"As shocking as it may seem, small groups in a congregation usually turn on their leader over relatively small issues. Usually the Pastor makes a suggestion of improvement or asks someone to make some type of change. If people have oversensitive, proud or rebellious attitudes, their immediate reaction is one of extreme anger, with the underlying attitude: "Who are you to try to tell us what to do?" Sadly, even the most basic biblical concepts of pastoral authority are utterly foreign in the minds of many who cause this ugly repeating pattern in churches. In most cases, their godless approach to resolve the dispute is to quickly dump on fellow believers who support the pastor and/or abruptly cut off relationships so that "we can move on and start afresh". Nothing could be more unbiblical or opposite to the ways of God! Like little else, angry attitudes break God's heart, shame His name and devastate His work in a church."*

### **Pastors are NOT Hired Hands**

*"An especially sad form of this condition occurs when a minister has been with a church for some years and a relatively small group decides "Its just time for a change." Under that phrase a world of ungodly behavior is committed against pastors, staff, lay leaders and the church itself. And even though most grievances against a pastor are often relatively minor and subjective, God's servant is essentially handed his walking papers. Though he may have faithfully led and suffered with the people through many valleys, all of that is easily forgotten"*

***“A sign of deep modern wickedness is the fact that many now view God’s ministers as an “expendable” hired hand we can fire at will.” Very little could be more contrary to biblical teachings or less like the attitude of Christ. God will NOT indefinitely tolerate such carnal, unscriptural patterns for treating his servants or conducting church. Sooner or later, serious chastisement comes to churches or individuals who persistently practice such godless patterns. God’s holiness and concern for kingdom work cannot allow such conditions to continue indefinitely. God’s called servants are not just “hired hands”. Such attitudes are the opposite of anything even remotely resembling loving or mature Christian behavior.”***

This does not mean that we must blindly follow a pastor that is attempting to lead a church in an ungodly manner or contrary to scripture. The Bible does not command us to do that. There are biblical and Godly ways for dealing with an unbiblical leader. But making a pastor’s work burdensome instead of joyful because we demand that he prove himself to us, or simply because we want him to know that we are in control of the church, is in direct conflict with God’s word. If we know and understand God’s word about how we are to relate to and treat a Godly pastor, called as God’s gift to us, and we fail to obey his word, then brothers and sisters, we ought to be ashamed and seeking forgiveness because we are being deliberately disobedient to God. (SIN)

***As Dr. Frizzell writes: “One thing is certain – The Bible leaves no doubt that God will not indefinitely tolerate such obviously damaging ungodly behavior in a local congregation.”***

### **Will God Really Punish his church?**

Now let me be brutally honest. The Bible makes it very clear how God reacts when his people are deliberately disobedient. He withholds his blessings from them and if his people continue to disobey and fail to repent, he releases his wrath and judgment upon them. If we don’t understand that, we need to start reading the bible all over again.

### **Hebrews 10:26-27, 30-31 (NIV)**

***<sup>26</sup>If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup>but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God***

***<sup>30</sup>For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, “and again,” The Lord will judge his people.” <sup>31</sup>It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***

## THE SPIRITUAL MIRROR & THE SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTION (again)

So what is the point of all this teaching on what the Bible says about church members and their pastors? Let's go back to the question from Dr. Frizzell's book that I started out with.

***“Does your church have a healthy, biblical view of honoring the pastor as a spiritual leader, or more as temporary hired help? Do you view calling a pastor as a sacred union of love until “God do you part”, or more as a temporary trial run we can end at will?”***

Now that we have reviewed what the Bible says about this, we need to seriously consider these questions. We must take a penetrating look into that “spiritual mirror”.

### **Above – Average Commitment?**

We must also make an honest assessment of whether we as a body are willing to make the necessary commitment to become true servant members, to covenant to being obedient to God's word regarding how we will relate to our pastor. In that regard, in his book *Seeking God to Seek a Pastor*, Dr. Frizzell says:

***“Make no mistake – God will seldom waste an “above average” leader on people unwilling to embrace “above average” commitment. If your honest assessment is that [your church] has been average or less, you should fervently pray about how you can prepare your church to be ready to change and grow.”***

In other words, if we are not willing to make an above average commitment to become true servant members, which means denying ourselves and submitting to God's authority and the authority of the pastor He calls to us, then we are being foolish to expect that God will gift us with an above-average pastor. Do not expect anything different from the efforts of the pastor Search Team.

### **Willingness to Change**

In his book: *The Kingdom Focused Church*, Gene Mims, a respected Southern Baptist Pastor with over 30 years experience, writes from a pastor's perspective:

***“Congregations have to realize that no preacher can lead them where they don't want to go. He can't lead them to minister if they refuse to minister. He can't lead them to love if they're intent on being mean. They can change pastors every year for the next fifty years and nothing will change until they are willing to change”***

## **A Wistful Look Back (into the Mirror) at FBC Perry**

Let me speak from my heart for a minute or two about FBC Perry. Having been a member here now since I was 12 years old, (40 years), I have been praying nearly all of those years that we would someday be able to break out of the pattern of the revolving door pastors that we have during that time. Some of our pastors left us because God truly called them to other places, but for several others we made their ministry a burden and forced them out. You may disagree with me that our history of pastoral changes has been detrimental to this church, and that other factors have led to our recent decline. But we are all familiar with churches in other communities (where family, friends or maybe even you have been a member) which had a pastor that had been allowed to lead them for a long term (15, 20 or 25 plus years). Those churches have been able to achieve great things in their communities for the glory of God. Most of you know of churches like that. And the sad truth is, we have failed to reach that level, even though we have had the opportunity here in Perry to do so all this time.

With every new pastor, we called to this Church, I hoped that we would seize the great opportunity that God has presented us with in Perry to glorify him and be a real difference maker in our community. But time after time we have failed to fully grasp the opportunity that is before us. Most of you are familiar with the expression “grab the brass ring” which in our culture has come to mean to strive for the highest prize, or living life to the fullest. It can be said that we have reached out to “grab the brass ring” as a church from time to time and actually taken hold of it. But in recent years, when we have changed pastors, we let go of it, and now it seems so distant that it appears to be beyond our reach. But it is not. The opportunity God has provide us in Perry is still there, waiting for us to seize it and become the church that will make a dramatic impact on this community for God’s Kingdom, to become the church that God wants us to be. But that opportunity will not be there indefinitely or forever. The time to act is now!

## **Why should we Seek a Long-Term Pastor?**

When the Pastor Search Team came together we made it our goal to do everything in our power to maximize the chances that this church will be able to call the man that could lead us for a truly long-term pastorate. By that I mean to be able to find the man that God will equip to lead us for 10, 15 years or even longer, which I believe will give us the chance to become that Church that God wants us to be.

But some may ask, “What’s wrong with having a new pastor every 5 years or so?” Do we really need to have a pastor stay 10, 15 or 20 years in order to be the church God wants us to be? Well, let’s look at that question. First, as Gene Mims, tells us again from *The Kingdom Focused Church*:

***“It takes a long time to pastor a church and get to the point where [a pastor] can touch the spiritual core of [his] people. It takes seven to ten years on average to develop that level of mutual trust. And if it takes seven to ten years to become a true pastor of a church, and [he] moves every four or five years, then [he] never really pastors a church.”***

If that is true (and I believe it is), then the corollary to that statement is this: **If a church changes pastors every 4-5 years, then that church never really experiences the kind of relationship with its pastor that God intends.** In spite of the Biblical teaching to follow a pastor's leadership, we all tend to hold back our full trust in a pastor until we feel he has proved himself to us before we will follow his leadership. And until we truly follow a pastor's vision, then we cannot truly "build up the church" as God has instructed us. (Eph. 4:12)

Second, I can't speak for other churches, but when we have changed pastors, **this church has usually lost whatever ground we had gained in accomplishing God's kingdom work (and sometimes more) under the previous pastor's leadership (one step forward & two steps back).** And although the average length of pastorates in all Southern Baptist churches is only about 18 months, if you look at those churches we mentioned earlier that are truly successful in accomplishing great things for God's kingdom and have made a dramatic difference in their community, they all have long-term pastors, who have served 15 - 20 or more years. And they have a congregation whose members continually support, encourage and submit to their pastor's leadership and vision for the church.

#### **A Hard Look into the Spiritual Mirror at FBC Perry**

Since the 1980's we have had 5 permanent pastors (not counting interim pastors). None of them served more than 6 years. I know that numbers are not the sole measurement of the effectiveness of a church, but in the past 40 years, the population of Perry and the surrounding unincorporated area has more than doubled in population. And just since 2000, the population of the city of Perry alone has increased nearly 20%. Yet in spite of this impressive growth in our community, our Sunday School attendance at FBC has plummeted. In the 1980's FBC averaged about 600 people in attendance at Sunday School whereas currently we are fortunate to have 300 in Sunday school on a given Sunday. We went from full attendance at TWO worship services on Sunday mornings to being unable to fill this sanctuary for a single service currently. I don't even want to mention the church budget, which has suffered greatly from this dramatic decline.

It is not my intention to unfairly focus attention solely on the negative aspects of our church's recent history. To be sure, through the efforts of its pastors, staff and servant member/leaders, this church has accomplished some great things, and many lives have been changed and souls saved. Even now, many good things are being accomplished as we seek to find our way "out of the wilderness". But don't be fooled into thinking that we can ignore the problems we have and expect them to go away. They have only gotten worse over the past 10 years, and they will continue to grow like a cancer unless we are willing to be honest and confront them, confess them, and change them (repentance). It is also folly for us to expect God to send us a man who like a miracle will solve all our problems for us and make everything wonderful again. As Dr. Frizzell has said, **God is not going to send an above average pastor to a church unwilling to make an above average commitment to serving God and not ourselves.**

Some might say that the problem is because we as a church have simply failed to call the right man to lead us, or lay the blame at our former pastors' feet. We could say that we had some bad luck, or that God simply called some of our pastors to other places, but after 40 years of repeating the same pattern and the dramatic decline of this church I believe that it is high time that we take a long hard look in the mirror and be honest with ourselves about whether we are going to continue with our same attitudes and behavior. If we continue to be the same, we will most certainly derive the same results we are currently experiencing. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to make a fundamental change in how we respond to God's direction concerning our church - pastor relationship in order to get different results.

### **Recognizing the Enemy**

**Some of you remember Pogo Possum, Walt Kelly's comic character who lived in the Okefeenokee swamp. One of Pogo's most famous quotes is: "We have met the enemy and he is US" which is all about coming to realize that our own behavior is the cause of our troubles. In reality, it is Satan, acting through us, and we ought to recognize his deception by now. He wants to keep us in the dark, ignorant and unaware of the true causes of our dilemma and thus prevent us for accomplishing God's kingdom work. And we let him.**

Ladies and Gentlemen: There is no doubt that the series of changes in leadership after relatively short-term pastorates has had a detrimental effect on the "building up" of this church. The latest crises surrounding the end of Rick Parker's pastorate has been especially harmful to FBC. Regardless of what he might have done or failed to do; regardless of the mistakes he might have made, we failed to honor the Biblical principles for how we were to treat our pastor and we alone bear the responsibility for the harm suffered by this church surrounding his departure. By any measure, we have failed to "build up this church" and we have the responsibility correct that. It is OUR work for us to do. It is not Wayne Edwards' job to do by himself and it is not the job of our next Pastor. The Bible doesn't say that the pastor is to "build up the church" by himself. He is to equip us to do it. Building up the church is our job as servant members, with the pastor as our leader and equipper. God does not call us to start a local church, build it and then let it become stagnant or to decline. His word calls us to continually build up his church. It is time we got busy doing that. There is no pastor, anywhere, who can do it for us or even lead us to do it if we fail to heed God's word concerning how we are to relate to him.

It is my heartfelt belief that many of us have not understood the biblical model for a congregation – pastor relationship. I know that I didn't until God fully revealed this to me in the past few weeks. Whether we understood it or not, there is no doubt we as a collective body of members have failed to live up to that model, and we are now reaping what we have sown. **It is also my honest belief, that if we do not make a serious change in how we view the office of pastor and relate to whatever man God sends to us for that office, then we will be searching for another pastor in just a few years, no matter how good he preaches, teaches or ministers.** If we are not willing to change, Do NOT expect anything different.

### **How do we change things? Only with PRAYER.**

**So how do we make that change? I don't know of any step-by-step process or "magic" formula whereby we can suddenly change this pattern of attitude and behavior. There is only prayer.** And that is the main reason I come to you today. To say to you: "If we love this church and we care about whether this church will submit to God so that we can accomplish the great things that God has prepared for us, then we need to get down on our knees and pray fervently for a change in attitude, a true revival of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

This is my purpose in coming to you today, to exhort you and encourage you to pray for ourselves and each other individually and collectively as members of the same body: Not just a "lip-service" prayer, but deep sincere heart-felt prayer, earnest, fervent prayer, not just here this morning, but daily and regularly, until God convicts each of us individually and collectively, of the commitment that he expects from us as servant members of HIS church.

### **Six things to Pray For/About at FBC PERRY**

I now therefore urge you to pray specifically for these things:

- 1) Spiritual introspection, so that we will see ourselves as God sees us, both individually and as a collective body of believers**
  
- 2). A willingness to set aside our personal desires (deny ourselves) and focus only on what God wants for His church at FBC Perry**
  
- 3) An understanding of the Biblical model of the relationship between congregation and the position of pastor.**
  
- 4) That we would be willing to trust submit to and follow our pastor's God gifted leadership and vision.**
  
- 5) Patience, as we finish the transition process and seek out our next pastor.**
  
- 6) Discernment and wisdom as described in Romans 12:2, so that we will know God's will for us.**

## **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, we are at a critical crossroads, a fork in the road to the future. One way will lead to a healthy future for this church. The other will lead to continued decline and eventual collapse. For several years we have been a “lukewarm” church, like the church in Laodicea that Christ spoke of in Revelation chapter 3. Remember what Christ said about that church:

***<sup>15</sup> “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! <sup>16</sup> But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! <sup>17</sup> You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Revelation 3:15-17 (NLT)***

People, we must realize that we are wretched and miserable and poor and blind. We must open our eyes. The time for recovery is now. We cannot afford to continue the attitudes of the past. The path we choose to follow during the next few weeks and months will determine whether this church returns to spiritual health, or continues to decline.

Now is the time for honesty, brokenness and repentance. Christ is reaching down to us to lift us back up to recovery; but we must reach out and take his hand, by getting down on our knees in confession before him. It is time for all of us to let go of our anger and hurt feelings about past events and to give up any pretense of self-righteous justification for our behavior. We must get on our knees and pray.