

IX. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#5: Godly Leadership and Presbyterian Polity”
John 1:1–8
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Let's start by looking at John 1. This is God's Word and God's Word is the truth, inspired, inerrant and infallible. This is a glorious picture of our Savior. John 1:1–8 says [1] *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* [2] *He was in the beginning with God.* [3] *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* [4] *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* [5] *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

[6] *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* [7] *He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.* [8] *He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

You have probably heard the phrase time and time again ‘minister of the Gospel’ or ‘Gospel minister.’ In this service as Jason has finished his seminary and his trials of ordination he is now being installed as an assistant pastor for the purpose of being a minister of the Gospel or a Gospel minister. So how do you look at a minister of the Gospel? By no means can I cover everything in this study as to what it means to be a Gospel minister, the vocation or calling of a minister of the Gospel but I thought I would take a biographical snippet of the first Gospel minister in the New Covenant.

Most of us who are Gospel ministers are on this side of Jesus. We know of His finished work, His glorious atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension, His promised second coming and His present intercession for His people as He is at work from the throne of heaven by the Spirit of God in the body of Christ ministering to and through His people throughout this world. This ministry was initiated by the Apostles and continues on by those whom they trained, our church fathers and now comes down to us with 2,000 years of those who have been called to the Gospel ministry by the risen Savior but there was one who kind of set the ground work for us.

His name was John the Baptist. John was called to be a Gospel minister, not on the other side of Christ's work but leading Christ's work and we're given a little snippet of his life. This opening verse is particularly meaningful during this Advent season as we celebrate the birth of Christ and hearing ‘the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ Christ came for us. Philippians 2:8 says [8] *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* I Corinthians 15:21 says [21] *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* So He has come to do this work and we see this glorious statement that He has come in the flesh so that we might have life through His work on our behalf as He goes to the cross to save us from our sins.

Having said, realized and understood that, the very first New Testament voice of the Word which the Word had sent, is John the Baptist. Many of us now have the privilege to be a voice for His Word. So what does the Word say about the one who came in the Spirit of Elijah, sent to speak and announce the coming of the Savior? I want to bring out five things from John 1 and think about Gospel ministers in general in this way and in particular of those you know

who are ordained and installed Gospel ministers. They are called teaching elders in the PCA. Some denominations would call them ministers of the Word under the calling of a Gospel minister.

What is the Gospel ministry and how should we view Gospel ministers? The first thing is ‘there came a man.’ The Gospel minister is a man. He is not God and not to be treated as if he is God. He has come on behalf and sent by God but he is a man. Therefore Gospel ministers will have good days and bad days for they are not perfect but men sent from God. They are not ubiquitous – they can’t be everywhere. I love the way God has fashioned His church and it’s one of the reasons I am a Presbyterian for it has to do with plurality of leadership in the church. No one man can be where he needs to be or all the places he needs to be but thank God that each time you see the word elder or church in the Bible, elder is plural and church is singular. We have all our limitations and frailties of the flesh. We are in the process of sanctification like everyone else. Now God willing we have attained some level of blessing so that we can function above reproach in the congregation but by no means is it anywhere nearing perfection. We are men saved by grace, called by God’s grace to serve and proclaim the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. So those should be the expectations.

Secondly, we are men sent from God. This is a long process to go through to be installed and ordained and I appreciate all those who stay the course and persevere through it along with the wives who support their husbands as they go through this process. Why do we go through this whole process? I certainly am not trying to be critical of other fellowships but I am grateful to be a part of a denomination that a man doesn’t send himself. He is sent from God.

The Bible says in Romans 10:13–15, [13] *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”*

Ministers of the Gospel do not send themselves. They are sent by the Spirit of God who calls them internally and then calls them externally through His church. As far as we can tell these men have been gifted and called of God for His church to the Gospel ministry. So they have been called internally by the Spirit of God and externally led by the Spirit of God the church has tested them to see if they are called as far as we can see externally. Do they have the gifts, the graces, the abilities? The laying on of hands is extremely important. I love these sacred moments but we did not communicate anything to Jason and Jim for our laying on hands was setting them aside and recognizing what God has given to them, and how God has called and sent them. We have done our best to determine whether God has called them and gifted them.

By the way, if you talk to any Gospel minister they have been called internally and externally but it doesn’t happen the same way. For me, I was called externally for I had people telling for a long time ‘I think God has called you to the ministry’ and I kept saying ‘I don’t think so.’ Then God awakened it internally in me so both of them have to be there. When the challenges of the ministry come for they do come, they will have good days and bad days and many times you will be the brunt of their bad days when they have them. You have to know that God has called you. If you don’t know internally and externally then you won’t stay the course.

Ephesians 4:11–12 says [11] *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.* The Apostles and Prophets have already been given and they are no more. They gave us the Word of God. Now I want you to hear this very humbling statement and any minister of

the Gospel who hears this any other way does not understand – God has chosen that minister and set him aside. He has gifted that minister. He has put them through the rigors of life all to frame and form him because God Himself is sending him.

Because the Gospel minister is a man and not God he therefore is not above critique and we are in desperate need of it but they are sent from God. God's hand is on them so when you handle them you handle them rightly. There are probably some who wonder if I have any problems because I am treated way to well in this congregation. This is merely for your equipping and to share with others. This was why David was so careful about how he handled Saul, because he knew Saul was there by the appointment of God. We are always careful when we are handling those that God has called, gifted and sent. That is why ministers are careful by how they deal with you because the people of God are the elect of God, sprinkled clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. They are not ours but His and were to shepherd God's flock which He purchased with His own blood. So they are not above critique or challenge but it does determine how we do it. John the Baptist wasn't any man but he was a man that God had called, gifted and sent. God put him where he was.

Thirdly, he came to bear witness of the Light. That is what Gospel ministers do. They don't seek celebrity status. They don't seek to be the place of focus. Should you respect Gospel ministers? Yes, for God sent them but they are not the object of adoration or adulation. On the contrary, they are here to point you to Christ. We come to bear witness of the Light, the true Light that has entered into the world, Jesus Christ. The Light of Christ dispels the terrors of sin and darkness by His saving and redeeming work. Gospel ministers don't come to exalt themselves but they come to bear witness to the living God to the glory of God that God Himself would use them to lift others up. This is what he is totally and fully committed to and pours himself out as a drink offering.

Fourthly, he is not the Light. He is an instrument, a voice. He is not the Word but a voice and one of many voice God has called to preach this glorious Gospel Word. So he bears witness of the Light in how he lives, and what he preaches and teaches but is not the Light. He should not be confused with the Light.

I had open heart surgery last February and I was very grateful after I went back to talk with my surgeon after six weeks. I thanked him and I still remember being rolled into the operating room and them telling me it was 34 degrees in that room. They asked me if I wanted some warm blankets and I said 'Yes how about five of them?' I was aware of what the surgery would entail. There is no doubt in my mind that operating room had excellent equipment and I'm grateful for it but I didn't go back to that operating room, pick up a scalpel and say 'oh scalpel thank you so much for you did such a wonderful job.' I was grateful for the scalpel and I'm convinced they had great instruments but I went to the surgeon and thanked him.

We are instruments, scalpels, forceps etc. and thank God for the wonderful calling to be an instrument as a Gospel minister but it's the Savior that saves you. It is what He did on the cross that saves you. There was a time when some incompetent, fallible, frail preacher preached a sermon and God owned it for Jesus Himself to speak to your heart. Again, Romans 10:13–14, *[13] For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Do you encourage that preacher? Yes, thank you preacher for being faithful but you go to Jesus.*

The preacher is not the Light, but he is an instrument, a voice, used of God and deserves encouragement. We are to encourage those who labor among us, but the preacher is not the

Savior so fix your eyes on Jesus. Jesus is the Light of glory and grace. He saves us and brings us all the way to glory.

Preachers, when you are doing your ministry and people go through your new members class it feels good when they come up and say ‘preacher, I just love your preaching.’ Some will even say ‘I never heard the Gospel until I came to this church and heard your preaching.’ Kill the old man here and don’t let it fill you with pride but it can be heady when people say that. I would like to remind you of this when you go through those moments just realize that there are those same people in another church telling other pastors in another church the same thing. Yes there are people who have grown up in churches and never heard the Gospel but many times the Gospel was there they just didn’t hear it. Then God chose under some fallible preacher that moment to give them eyes to see and ears to hear and you were allowed that day to be used of the Lord. But never confuse what the Lord does through us with something that we have done.

Fifthly, there are many purposes in the Gospel ministry of what a Gospel minister is supposed to accomplish, from shepherding the flock, being a steward of the Gospel, superintending the flock, managing etc. There are all kinds of responsibilities. In fact, there are so many responsibilities for a Gospel minister that the Bible uses multiple terms to describe the same office of the Gospel minister. Sometimes they are called stewards, bishops/overseers, pastors, shepherds, ministers, or servants and there are multiple titles because there are multiple responsibilities that they have. There is one that I want to point out here that is wrapped up in the simple statement here about John.

John 1:6–7 says [6] *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* [7] *He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light,(why?) **that all might believe through him.*** There is the Gospel minister’s ministry. You are to preach a Gospel, as you plead, pray, and persuade as your passions run deep so that your longing of all might believe in Jesus may come to fruition. You have a nondiscriminatory ministry for you are lavishly indiscriminate.

I love the picture of the parable of the sower. In the parable of the sower where does the sower sow the seed? It is very simple for he sows the seed everywhere – hard ground, good ground, thorny ground, rocky ground. There have been many times in my life where I have thought it was hard ground but it was good ground and then there were times where it was hard ground but God started using the seed to start plowing up that hard ground into good ground. We put the seed everywhere and it is a lavish, indiscriminate spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere and everywhere.

I want to say one more thing about John the Baptist when we talk about a minister of the Gospel before I close. Someone said to me one time ‘I want to be very careful that I don’t compliment you too much because I don’t want you to get a big head, get prideful.’ Go ahead and compliment because I will have an email list coming in weekly that will take care of the pride thing. God gives us plenty of times to help us in that call to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God but we need to make it a ministerial priority. Gospel ministers should be the prime examples of what it means, not to be first, to be last and not to take the place of adulation but to take the position of a servant, not to take the scepter but the towel. Ours is the power of the towel.

I don’t know all that Jesus meant by this but I do know He said in Matthew 11:11a [11a] *Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.* And is our prototype yet what did John the Baptist say? In John 3:30 he said [30] *He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.* He didn’t simply say ‘I want Jesus to be lifted up’ for he continued to say ‘and I want to go down.’ John the Baptist wanted Jesus exalted

and himself to be humbled. So as it says in I Peter 5:6, *[6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* He must increase and I must decrease. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the great privilege to see what You have done in these men's lives and what You are going to do in anticipation in and through their lives. We give You great praise for that! Father, we have already benefited from Jim's ministry even in the few short weeks he has been here so we have great anticipation of what the coming years are going to bring. God we have already had years of blessing in Jason's present ministry so we anticipate now with this recognition of what You have done and called him to be and do, where that is yet going to lead his ministry and all of the blessings that will flow from it. Father, for their wives, children and in Jim's case also grandchildren, I pray and give You thanks. We pray O God that You would bless the families of these men as they receive the Gospel ministry from their father, grandfather and husband and that they support them in their Gospel ministry. And we as a congregation have the opportunity to see them as men, who are not just any men, but men who have been called and sent by God to bear witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ but who never entertain any notion that they are the Light, only Christ and who passionately, fervently, and prayerfully desire for all kinds of people to be brought to Christ, to put their trust in Him alone for salvation through their ministry, as they indiscriminately proclaim the Gospel, lavishly spreading the seed. They will sometimes have opportunities to plant, harvest and cultivate but they are to keep planting the seed. Then O God as You bear much fruit as they serve You in Your vineyard we will give You praise, for Jesus' sake, Amen.