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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

THE DIFFICULTIES PASTORS FACE IN SHEPHERDING THE UNREGENERATE
WITHIN THEIR CONGREGATIONS

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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FALL CREEK, WISCONSIN
MAY 2023

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ABSTRACT

Pastors can face difficulties when trying to shepherd unregenerate people in their congregations. This qualitative case study investigated the characteristics of the difficulties and what effects they can have on pastors. A biblical and theological review of the book of Matthew provided an understanding of the theme of the “many and the few,” the wide and narrow gates, wolves in sheep’s clothing, and judging others. In addition, Matthew’s Gospel provided an understanding of defining the unregenerate and regenerate. The pastoral epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus provided a theological understanding of pastors' roles, responsibilities, and duties in relation to the unregenerate and regenerate believers. A literature review explored critical elements of the difficulties pastors face, including cultural Christianity, its perspective on regeneration, cheap grace, evangelism in a post-Christian culture, challenges inherent to pastoral ministry, and burnout. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how pastors and elders in the Forest Lakes District in the Evangelical Free Church of America define the unregenerate in their congregations, shepherd them, address conflict and challenges, and if they have developed and implemented strategies. Interviews were conducted with the pastors, and the elders completed an online questionnaire. The research revealed a substantial need for a definitive strategy in ministering to the unregenerate. Lastly, the study showed that pastors could experience burnout from stress due to conflict with some unregenerate people and from dealing with wolves in congregations.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF SHEPHERDING THE UNREGENERATE

While shepherding the unregenerate, pastors often face difficulties and challenges. The problem this project addressed is the lack of strategies for pastors to use when shepherding the unregenerate within their congregations. In response to this problem the researcher (a) engaged in biblical-theological study in the book of Matthew to define the unregenerate and the Pastoral Epistles to explain pastoral responsibilities, (b) reviewed relevant literature on cultural perspectives defining the unregenerate, and pastoral challenges and responsibilities pertaining to evangelizing the unregenerate, (c) conducted a qualitative case study regarding how pastors shepherd the unregenerate in their specific ministry contexts, and (d) developed strategies for pastors to navigate the difficulties and negative impacts shepherding the unregenerate can have personally on them.

Research Limitations and Assumptions

Evangelical Free Church of America, Forest Lakes District

The research for the project has been limited to Senior Pastors and Elders within the Forest Lakes District (FLD) of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). The EFCA is an association of autonomous churches united around the theological convictions of the current EFCA Statement of Faith.¹ It is comprised of 1,600

¹ Greg Strand, *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Church 2011), 19.

congregations across the United States and has a presence in over 80 countries worldwide. Each local church is united around a Statement of Faith² and sound biblical teaching. Its roots are planted in the Swedish and Norwegian Danish Associations of the Free Church. A merger between the two was completed in 1950 with the uniting of 275 churches. Thus, the Evangelical Free Church of America was born. Currently, the EFCA is made up of 17 districts in the United States, each representing a different geographic region with more than 1600 congregations.³

The district of focus in this project is the FLD which serves over 125 EFCA churches in Wisconsin and the western two-thirds of the upper peninsula of Michigan. The FLD consists of many ethnic and multicultural churches, with more being planted annually. The Forest Lakes District's mission is that "We exist to strengthen our member churches so that together we may multiply transformational churches among all people. As we stay on mission, our overall goal is to connect you with other leaders in similar ministry areas, equip you with the tools you need to grow, and help you and your church to multiply disciples and churches to the glory of God." The core values of the FLD are: (1) centered on the Gospel, word, and prayer, (2) culture of encouragement, (3) connecting relationships, (4) priority of all people, and (5) multiplication-driven.⁴

² Evangelical Free Church of America, "Current EFCA Statement of Faith adopted in 2019," Adopted by the Conference on June 19, 2019, Accessed February 12, 2022, <https://www.efca.org/sof>.

³ "EFCA at a Glance (2022)," Accessed November 21, 2022, <https://helps.efca.org/resources/efca-at-a-glance-2022>.

⁴ Forest Lakes District, "Our Mission and Values," Accessed November 19, 2022, <https://www.forestlakes-efca.org/about-the-fl-d>.

With a heart toward pastors, the FLD has established Senior Pastor Networks, designed to allow pastors to gather together to share issues, concerns, and struggles and encourage one another.

EFCA Practices Regenerate Membership

The project focused on the difficulties of pastoring and evangelizing the unregenerate. Since the EFCA practices regenerate membership, *Evangelical Convictions*,⁵ written by Greg Strand, the Executive Director of Theology for the EFCA, has been explored. This book provides a detailed overview of the theological distinctives within EFCA churches. He states, “Because the local church is to manifest the true church in the world, the essential requirement for membership in each should be the same—a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we affirm that membership in the local church should be composed only of believers, regenerated by the Holy Spirit.”⁶ In addition, to become a member of an EFCA church, a membership candidate must provide testimony to and show evidence of personal conversion.⁷ The EFCA’s position is this:

Membership in the local church is a corporate affirmation of a person’s profession, but we must not give the false impression, leading to a false assurance, that such an affirmation is unerring. Jesus warned us that some who appear to be sheep are really wolves in disguise (Acts 20:29-30), that the profession of some will prove false (Mt. 7:21-23) and that some will be surprised by the verdict on the Last Day (Mt. 25:31-46).⁸

⁵ Strand, *Evangelical Convictions*, 2011.

⁶ Strand, 164.

⁷ Strand, 165.

⁸ Strand, 165.

The tasks of interviewing a membership candidate and examining the person's life for godly fruit as evidence of regeneration by the Holy Spirit are often the responsibilities of the pastors, elders, and other church leaders. In conducting the interviews, church leaders are required to make a judgment, or assessment, about the candidate's profession, theological understanding, and faith journey. While this is no easy task, it is necessary as Jesus taught in Matthew 7:15 to, "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves."

Lastly, the researcher examined *A Theology of Church Membership for Effective Membership Management in a Local Baptist Church* by Samson A. Iliya, which pertains to regenerate church membership prerequisites. These include evidence of repentance, faith in Christ, regeneration, conversion, and baptism.⁹ One thing to note is that the EFCA does not require baptism for membership.

Biblical and Literature Limitations

The research has been limited to a study on selected passages in the Gospel of Matthew (7:1-6, 7:13-14, 7:15-20, 7:21-23; 9:37-38; 13:24-30; 22:14; 25:31-46) and the Pastoral Epistles of 1 Timothy (1:3-7; 3:1-7), 2 Timothy (2:14-26; 3:1-17; 4:1-5), and Titus (1:5-15; 3:4-11) to explore key theological themes, roles, and definitions. Lastly, the research has been limited to relevant literature pertaining to cultural perspectives of regeneration, strategies pertaining to evangelizing the unregenerate, and pastoral challenges.

⁹ Samson A. Iliya, "A Theology of Church Membership for Effective Membership Management in a Local Baptist Church," *Baptist Theological Seminary Kaduna Insight*, 16 no. 2 (October 2019): 205-207.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God. It is the perfect standard and measure to evaluate and determine those who are regenerate or unregenerate. The second assumption was that not everyone who attends worship services and/or church-related events is a regenerate believer. The third assumption was that pastors are called to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ. The fourth assumption was that a flock is comprised of a local church within the universal church. The fifth assumption was that the church consists of regenerate, born again disciples of Jesus Christ. The sixth assumption was that the pastor is called to evangelize the unregenerate and disciple the regenerate. The seventh assumption was that pastors can burn out from spending too much time, energy, and resources pouring into the unregenerate while neglecting the regenerate.

Definitions

The researcher has provided definitions for the following words and phrases used throughout the project:

Congregations – These consist of the regenerate and unregenerate who attend worship services and other church-related ministry events.

Evangelical Free Church of America - This is an association of autonomous churches united around the theological convictions of the current EFCA Statement of Faith.¹⁰

¹⁰ Strand, 19.

Pastoral Epistles - This term pertains to the three books of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus referenced in the project.

Pastor/Elder – This is one who is called by God and elected by a church to shepherd and teach the church (Eph. 4:11-14), to grow in the building up of the body of Christ, and who reflects the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-16, and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Pastoral Responsibilities – This refers to what the Bible requires for those called to pastoral ministry.

Regenerate Membership – This pertains to the EFCA requirement of regenerate membership in that only those who have been justified by faith, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, have repented of their sins, and profess that Jesus Christ is Lord can become members in the local church. In this way, the membership is a representation of the priesthood of the believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

Unregenerate – This term refers to those who are the many who enter in by the wide gate (Mt. 7:13-14), they are not born again in the Spirit (Jn. 3:5-6), they are not new creations in Christ (1 Cor. 5:17), they have not been regenerated, made new, by the Holy Spirit in the washing of their sins (Titus 3:5), they do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14), they do not exhibit good, godly fruit as a result of salvation (Mt. 12:33-37), they walk in the flesh and not in the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26), they show no evidence of sanctifying change (Phil. 1:6; 2 Cor. 3:18) and are unrepentant (Lk. 13:3; Mk. 1:15).

Strategies: methods and practices used to address the difficulties of shepherding the unregenerate and to prevent pastor burnout.

The Importance of the Project

Importance of the Problem to the Researcher

The problem is important to the researcher because of the experienced difficulties and frustrations of trying to shepherd, lead, and guide some people within the local body of Christ who seem to have very little or no interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. A pastor can come very close to burnout, or even burnout, while trying to pour into specific individuals while neglecting those who show a hunger for the Lord, His Word, and have a strong desire to serve the church and community.

The problem is important to the researcher because there does not seem to be very much available literature on the topic. Not everyone who attends worship services at a local church is saved, born again, and regenerated. Jesus taught that “unless” one is born again, he or she cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). Dr. R.C. Sproul expounds on this concept:

In the jargon of Christianity people speak of ‘born again’ Christians. Technically speaking, this phrase is redundant. If a person is not born again, if he is not regenerate, then he is not a Christian. He may be a member of a Christian church. He may profess to be a Christian. But unless a person is regenerate, he is not in Christ, and Christ is not in him.¹¹

Working on the front lines of ministry for the kingdom of God, the researcher has learned this can be quite confusing and frustrating at times. A problem exists in that the researcher has experienced that many pastors and church leaders do not want to address the issue for fear of being labeled as someone who is “judging” others. This problem is important to the researcher because, without a theological understanding of the matter,

¹¹ R.C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2020), 78.

pastors might attempt to shepherd those who are unregenerate the same as those who are regenerate. This can lead to frustration, hopelessness, and possible burnout when there is no evidence of godly fruit.

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

The problem is important to the researcher's immediate ministry context for several reasons. First, it is important to be able to distinguish between those who are regenerate and those who are not. Since the church holds a regenerate membership position, it is extremely important to be able to evaluate a person's faith using biblical standards, teachings, and principles without the guilt of being labeled as one who is "judging." Is it enough that one states that, "Jesus is Lord" to become a member? In the researcher's immediate ministry context, the answer is, "no." The leadership and current membership of the church are looking for specific biblical characteristics in the faith and life of potential candidates for membership. Without an evaluation or process in place, it is possible for those who are not in union with Jesus, not regenerate or born again, to become members, and have a say regarding the matters and operations of the body of Christ. This then defeats the purpose of regenerate membership and the priesthood of the believer's model.

Second, it is important for the church leadership to make a spiritual assessment regarding an attendee's faith journey in order to know how best to pray for the person, serve, and pastor them. A pastor is not going to shepherd everyone in the same way. Instead, an evaluation needs to occur in order to understand where the person is regarding their faith and salvation. The church must understand that there is a fine line between evangelism and discipleship. It can seem impossible to disciple someone who has not been adequately evangelized. Time, energy, and resources can be poured out on an

individual which can lead to the point of exhaustion and burnout. A problem might be that the person has not yet been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The problem is important to the church at large because it has often been accused of “judging” others. A recent research study by the Barna Group has revealed that 50% of Christians 18-25 years of age state that the church is judgmental.¹² The researcher has experienced this claim from both inside the church and from within the secular culture often citing Matthew 7:1 or Luke 6:37. Dr. Sproul comments on Matthew 7:1, “Almost everyone, Christian or not, knows these words in the Bible: ‘Judge not, that you not be judged’ (v.1). Because we live in a culture that claims everyone has a right to do what he or she wants to do, this verse gets quoted whenever the church makes a pronouncement against some form of sinful behavior.”¹³ These accusations need to be lovingly countered by Christians, and church leaders, with a sound biblical exegesis on these and other passages. This will require church leaders to be intentional about studying the passages and teaching them to their congregations in their proper contexts. This project will seek to provide a theological response to this problem in the next chapter.

Making the assumption, out of fear of appearing judgmental, that everyone who attends worship is saved produces challenges regarding how a pastor shepherds those who do not exhibit faith, a hunger for the Lord, His Word, and a love for the church. What seems to happen is that pastors, out of love for people, will spend enormous

¹² David Kinnaman, “What Young Adults Say Is Missing from Church,” *Articles in Millennials and Generations*, Barna Group, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/missing-church/>.

¹³ R.C. Sproul, *Matthew*, An Expository Commentary (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 161.

amounts of time trying to convince, coerce, and encourage people to the point of burnout and frustration. The Bible provides pastors and church leaders with more than enough teachings, truth, and foundation to be able to lovingly make a judgment, or an assessment, on whether or not a salvation issue is at hand. Being open to make this assessment will hopefully direct the pastor towards healthier models and practices when praying about how much time, energy, and resources to pour out on those they are seeking to shepherd to the Lord.

Project Overview

The first step the researcher took was to execute the biblical and theological review. This included a study of Matthew, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus to define the unregenerate and explain pastoral responsibilities. This step sought to discover the difference between the unregenerate and the regenerate and to discover pastoral responsibilities pertaining to each.

The second step was to engage in the literature review to discover (a) cultural perspectives of regeneration, (b) strategies pertaining to evangelizing the unregenerate, and (c) pastoral challenges related to these items.

The third step was to create research tools to gather needed data. This required (a) a set of questions to be used when conducting interviews with pastors and elders in the Forest Lakes District and (b) a set of questions for online questionnaires when face-to-face meetings are not applicable.

The fourth step was to conduct interviews with five senior pastors from various church sizes in the Forest Lakes District who are currently serving in those roles. The interviews took place at their churches or other designated locations. If meeting face-to-face was not feasible online video chat sessions were implemented.

The fifth step was to distribute online questionnaires to the elders and congregants of the Forest Lakes District from the same churches the senior pastors were interviewed.

The sixth step was to take the discoveries from the biblical and theological review, literature review, interviews, and questionnaires to analyze, interpret and synthesize the data for use in developing strategies to help pastors avoid burnout and be better equipped when facing difficulties in shepherding the unregenerate in their local churches.

The next chapter will explore what Scripture says about the regenerate and the unregenerate from the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. The researcher explored scholarly commentaries and performed an exegetical analysis of each passage to discover the differences between the regenerate and the unregenerate. In addition, the researcher explored the theme of the “many and the few” in the Gospel of Matthew as it pertains to those within the local congregation. Lastly, the researcher explored scholarly commentaries and performed an exegetical analysis on passages on 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus to determine a pastor’s responsibilities to the regenerate and unregenerate within the local church.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL AND THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Since the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God, it is our primary source for all truth. The purpose of this chapter is to explore what the Bible teaches about the problem pertaining to this project. Specific passages from four books of the Bible were studied and examined to understand better the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate in their congregations.

Matthew's Gospel captures the important themes and teachings of Jesus relevant to the problem this project addressed. First, Jesus communicated that there is a distinction between those inside and outside the family of God. This was important for the project to understand the distinctions between unregenerate and regenerate people. Since pastors will encounter both, holding a firm theological foundation on the matter is crucial. Second, Matthew's Gospel provides a set of themes and characteristics describing those who are unregenerate in comparison to the regenerate. These characteristics are essential for pastors to know in that they assist in discerning and determining one's spiritual status. Third, pastors must make an assessment, or judgment, to try to determine if a person is unregenerate or regenerate. Matthew's Gospel, more specifically, the Sermon on the Mount, directly addresses this subject as it pertains to the problem of this project.

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus were relevant to the problem of the project. Each book teaches key elements about pastoral ministry's roles and responsibilities. While not an exhaustive set of instructions, these three epistles provide essential guidelines and

boundaries pastors need to adhere to when shepherding not just the regenerate, but also the unregenerate within their congregations.

Lastly, Titus 3 specifically addresses the relevance of the problem in that it directly contains theological language and exegetical insight into the subject of regeneration. Since the EFCA practices regenerate membership, it is crucial to understand where this language is addressed in Scripture. Furthermore, this theological point provides pastors with a foundational understanding of defining the unregenerate and regenerate.

Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel account captures several thematic comparisons regarding the distinction between those who are part of the family of God and those who are not. Reading through the entire Gospel will reveal these contrasting categories of people: the many and the few, the weeds and the wheat, wolves, goats, and sheep. The task will be to discover the theological significance in the context of local churches, those who attend, and pastoral ministry.

The Many and the Few

Matthew 7:13-14, Sermon on the Mount

During the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus taught about two different groups of people, the many and the few, and two different gates, the narrow and wide gates. Jesus taught the disciples, those chosen by Christ, to enter by the narrow gate. The verb εἰσελθετε in verse 13 is second person plural and in the imperative denoting a command to more than one person. The narrow gate is different in contrast to the wide gate. The path this gate leads to is hard and difficult. It is not an easy life, yet as Jesus

taught, it is the gate that leads to life. It leads to eternal life. In fact, Jesus taught that few will find the narrow gate and enter by it. Jeannine Brown and Kyle Roberts explain,

The saying about the narrow gate accents the difficulty in choosing and living out the way that leads to life compared with the relative ease of the pathway leading to death. The effect of the saying is to heighten awareness and attention toward a person's current path or trajectory, encouraging a life of reflection and action pointed toward God and God's kingdom.¹⁴

This teaching on the narrow gate is a call to salvation. Yet, as Jesus taught, few will find it. He taught that most people do not go to heaven; those numbered among the redeemed are few.¹⁵

In contrast to the few and narrow gate, Jesus taught about the many and the wide gate. This gate is wide and very easy to walk through. It represents choosing one's path by way of the world and sin. This path is easy since it does not demand obedience to God's will and commands. Instead, it seeks to serve oneself. Sadly, this path is the one that will lead to destruction. Sproul comments, "In saying that the wide gate leads to destruction, Jesus was speaking gently, using *destruction* as a synonym for *hell* ... it is easy to get through the wide gate, and it opens onto a massively broad highway, so it is packed with people. So, many are on the road that leads to destruction."¹⁶ Hell is the final and eternal destination for those whose sins have not been forgiven when the righteous judgment of God is dealt with, and His wrath is poured out. EFCA theology teaches that those in hell will experience "eternal conscious punishment." Here is an explanation:

¹⁴ Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 79.

¹⁵ Sproul, *Matthew*, 175.

¹⁶ Sproul, *Matthew*, 175.

Though the term “conscious” is not commonly used in historic confessions, what it expresses has been the almost universal view of the church through history, with, until very recently, only a few theologians and smaller sects standing in opposition. The church has held that the language of Scripture assumes that the destinies of believers and unbelievers, though very different, stand in parallel, and both will continue to experience the consequences of their choice through eternity.¹⁷

This theological position supports Jesus’ teaching about hell and that the unregenerate will weep and gnash their teeth in eternity because they will continue to experience the cost of their disobedience and rebellion against the holy God. The wide and easy gate leads to this path of destruction, the one that “many” will enter by.

Matthew 9:37-38, The Harvest

In this passage, Matthew captures an essential aspect of Jesus’ ministry. It paints a picture of the Gospel in action: “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:35-36).” In verses 37-38, Jesus speaks to the disciples about this ministry and what they witnessed. He says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Jesus compares His healings and the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel to a harvest. In the Old Testament, metaphorical references to harvests, or reaping, generally referred to God’s judgment of the wicked on the Last Day. In this New Testament passage, Jesus is referring to the

¹⁷ Strand, 250.

harvest differently. Here, it refers to the gathering of God's people into His kingdom. The fields were ripe and ready to be harvested. God had prepared the harvest of his people to be brought into His storehouse.¹⁸

Jesus spoke about the harvest as plentiful, meaning much work was to be done. This applies to then in the first-century and now in our generation. When viewed in the context of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:28-30, the harvest indeed is plentiful. Jesus commands the church to be engaged in the labor of it for the sake of the kingdom of God. Sproul points out, "The message is simple: the kingdom of God needs men and women who will help bring in the harvest. Preachers, teachers, missionaries, and ordinary believers—all of us are called to participate in the harvest in one way or another."¹⁹

While the harvest is plentiful, Jesus makes a clear assertion about the laborers. They are few. Again, Matthew captures the thematic view of the many and the few. Here, the harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few. This theme, established in Matthew 7:13-14, seems to extend into this passage in Matthew 9:37-38. The few who enter by the narrow gate represent those who are born again, regenerate believers in Christ, the people of God who obediently and willingly work the harvest for the kingdom of God. There are not "many" laborers because they have entered through the easy and wide gate. They have no interest or desire to serve the "Lord of the harvest." Or, in some cases, works might be done in the name of Jesus but for the wrong reasons and motives. After all, in

¹⁸ Sproul, *Matthew*, 260.

¹⁹ Sproul, *Matthew*, 260.

Matthew 7:21-23, following verses 13-14 of the same chapter, Jesus will say to those who did works in his name but were not of Him these extremely hard words to hear:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

R.T. France comments that this is the ultimate rejection of those whose discipleship was only superficial.²⁰ Both passages, Matthew 7:13-14 and 7:21-23, have eschatological implications. In the context of Matthew 9:37-38, laboring in the harvest is in the present before the parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the work being done by the few.

Matthew 22:14, Many are Called; Few are Chosen

Matthew again uses the theme of the “many and the few” in the Parable of the Wedding Feast in 24:14. In this teaching, Jesus distinguishes between those who are called or invited and those who are chosen and partake in the wedding feast. The wedding feast symbolizes the blessing of God’s salvation.²¹ R.T France comments on this verse,

This epigram sums up the message of this parable, and indeed also of the two which precede it. It picks up the language of the parable: the first group of guests had all been “invited” (vv.3, 4, 8), but that did not mean that they would enjoy the feast. So in their place others have been: invited” (v.9), but now even one of them has failed to make the grade. Who then are the “chosen”? The term will recur in 24:22, 24 to designate God’s true people, threatened but protected through the time of trial, and in 24:31 for those summoned from all over the world to make up the new people of God after the failure of the old regime. It is a term with strongly ideological concept: the true “chosen people” is not automatically identified with those who belong to the Israelite community, not even who are its official leaders: these are the invited, but not necessarily the chosen. The “many” and the “few” speak of a weeding process, whereby many of those invited will not make it to the

²⁰ R.T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (TNTC) (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1985), 152.

²¹ France, TNTC, 315.

feast. The chosen are the new tenants who will produce the fruit, who, as we have seen in the last parable, may be Jewish or Gentile; the chosenness does not depend on their racial origin but on their response to God's summons and their readiness to give God his due.²²

The Greek word ἐκλεκτοί (chosen, v.14) does indeed evoke eternal salvation.²³

The weeding process between the “many” who are called and the “few” who are chosen (the elect) speaks to the biblical doctrine of election. R.C. Sproul points out that,

Many receive the outward call of the gospel, but not everyone hears it inwardly. The Apostle Paul speaks of the “effectual call” of the gospel that is given only to the elect: ‘Whom He predestined, these He also called: whom He called, these He also justified (Rom. 8:30). Many hear the gospel, and some make a false profession of faith. However, from every nation God not only calls people outwardly, but by the power of His Holy Spirit He calls them inwardly, changing the dispositions of their hearts so that whereas they once were unwilling to come into the presence of the King and His Son, suddenly they are both willing and eager.’²⁴

The theological question to explore is whether or not the theme of the “many and the few” spoken by Jesus in Matthew is quantitative. Brown and Roberts write that “the use of this language pair (‘many’/‘few’; cf. 7:13-14) is less about speculation over numbers than indication that not all Jews will be responsive to the kingdom as announced and enacted by Jesus, their king.”²⁵ Conversely, while commenting on Matthew 7:13-14, R.T. France refers to Luke 13:23-24 when someone asks the critical question of “will those who are saved be few?” France responded with this: “True discipleship is a

²² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 827-828.

²³ Ben F. Meyer, “Many (= All) Are Called, But Few (= Not All) Are Chosen,” *New Testament Studies*, 36 no. 1 (January 1990): 90.

²⁴ Sproul, *Matthew*, 584.

²⁵ Brown and Roberts, 201.

minority religion.”²⁶ True discipleship refers to those who are truly born again, the regenerate believers in Christ. Those who endure to the end (Mt. 24:13). The faithful disciples of Jesus follow him and obey His commands. In John 6:66, “many” walked away from Jesus because His teaching was too hard for them. In 1 John 2:19, John shares how people left the company of believers because they were not in Christ to begin with.

Sproul comments that Jesus taught that most people do not go to heaven; those numbered among the redeemed are few.²⁷ In contrast to the position that Jesus’ thematic usage of the “many and the few” in Matthew 22:14 was only relevant to first-century Palestine, Sproul speaks quantitatively about our world today. He wrote,

They note there had been much corruption and many people had fallen away from Orthodox Judaism, leaving only a remnant—the few who embraced Jesus at that time. Perhaps that is the case. However, those who embraced Him had far more firsthand evidence of His identity than we do, and if that evidence produced only a small contingent of followers, I cannot imagine that, in the Western world today, regenerate people are the majority. It is exciting to hear of revival happening in places such as South Korea, China, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Multitudes are coming to Christ, and perhaps in some nations the redeemed are in the majority. However, in America, I fear that the vast majority is on the broad way, the path to destruction.

It is this theological tension that pastors and church leaders in America wrestle with within their congregations. Is everyone who attends worship service, or even church members, among the “few”? How “many” have been born again and regenerated by the Holy Spirit? How many will be in the future? These are tough questions to ask. If only a few have been saved, what does that say about the rest of the people? Since only God knows the answers to these questions, pastors and church leaders are not entirely in the

²⁶ France, TNTC, 150.

²⁷ Sproul, *Matthew*, 175.

dark. Jesus taught about specific distinctions of people within congregations. He provided important characteristics of those a pastor might find within the flock of a local church.

Wolves, Goats, Sheep, Weeds, and Wheat

Matthew 7:15 False Prophets, Wolves

Immediately following Jesus' teaching on the "many and the few" in Matthew 7:13-14, He instructs the disciples to beware and watch out for false prophets. The false prophets are wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. Wolves do not belong amid a flock of sheep. They will seek to destroy and kill. These false prophets will try to enter into the fold of the flock in disguise. They will attempt to look like the sheep of the flock, those in Christ with Jesus as their Shepherd. They will learn the language of the church, attend worship services and events, sing along corporately, and even position themselves into teaching positions.

The penalty for a false prophet in the Old Testament was death (Dt. 13:1-5; Jer. 23:9-40), for they do not speak for God. Instead, they speak from their hearts and minds. They do not seek to give God glory. The test of a prophet was if they claimed a word from the Lord, and if the thing did not come to pass (Dt. 18:22), they were indeed not speaking for the Lord. Wrongly representing God is a serious sin and violation of His holiness and righteousness.

As false prophets existed in the time of the Old Testament community of God's people, Jesus warned that they would continue to exist in the community of saints in the New Testament church. As the Prophet Jeremiah's message from the Lord about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon was an unpopular one, one that fueled false prophets of Jeremiah's day, Jesus knew that the Gospel and pronouncement of the coming of the kingdom of God would be unpopular as well. In

Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus provides instructions on recognizing a false prophet or wolf. He uses the imagery of a tree and its fruit. A false prophet will bear bad fruit. Jesus says, “So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit (Mat 7:17-18).” Wolves amid a congregation will not produce good fruit, for they are unhealthy, sickly, and diseased trees. Bad fruit stands in complete contrast to the good fruit of God in a regenerate believer. The Apostle Paul distinguishes between the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:16-26. One truly in Christ will produce, in increasing measure, more of the fruit of the Spirit and less of the flesh as a new creation in Christ being sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Phil. 1:6). One might profess Christ. Yet, their words, actions, lives, and how they love speak differently and against their profession of faith. Jesus states a judgment for the false prophets and wolves in Matthew 7:19. Since a farmer has no use for a tree that does not bear good fruit, it is to be cut down and burned in a fire.²⁸ A false prophet is outside of God’s family, and their destiny will be spent in eternal damnation.

The warning to “beware” of false prophets is real and serious. They are not numbered among the sheep. Yet, at times, they exist within the community of saints in local churches across the world. While Christians are called to love their enemies (Mt. 5:43-48), Jesus also distinguishes false prophets and that His true disciples will know them by their fruit. A pastor (ποιμήν, in Ephesians 4:11) is called to be a shepherd to guide and equip the sheep. A pastor cannot shepherd a wolf. The wolf will strike at the

²⁸ Sproul, *Matthew*, 177.

shepherd in an attack to gain access to the flock. In order to protect the sheep, the shepherd must get rid of the wolf. This role of the church pastor must be revived and explored in the midst of our current generation. In Acts 20:28-30, the Apostle Paul warned the elders at the church in Ephesus when he said:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Let us be reminded that these wolves are often disguised as sheep. They might look and sound like sheep, but their bad fruit will give them away. They must be dealt with.

Pastors and elders must protect the flock against the ravenous and unregenerate wolves among God's people. In addition, dealing with a wolf, or wolves, in a congregation requires time and energy. These encounters can be stressful and painful as pastors seek ways to lovingly, peacefully, and graciously address the carnage being done to the sheep. Pastoral ministry comes with its own challenges, trials, and stressors. Adding in the need to deal with wolves only compounds the tension and hardship.

Matthew 25:31-36, Goats and Sheep

This passage is nestled at the end of the Olivet Discourse when Jesus described the events of His return and the final judgment. It is eschatological. However, the effects are felt and experienced in the present. Jesus, again, uses comparative language to define those who are His and those who are not. Here, He speaks about goats and sheep and the separation of the two at His return. The goats represent those who are not His. These are the unregenerate unbelievers. They have not repented of their sins or placed their faith in

Jesus Christ. They have lived in rebellion and disobedience against the Lord. The goats are destined to eternal conscious damnation in eternal hell.

On the contrary, the sheep are the people of God. These are the ones whom the Father has drawn to the Son (Jn. 6:44). They have been justified by faith, redeemed, and forgiven. They have repented of their sins, taken up their cross, and lived by faith. Their destiny is with Jesus for all eternity in heaven. The sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd. They know Him, and He knows them, for they are His. The sheep follow the commands of the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:3-5).

This passage illustrates the fact that the goats and the sheep are together. They dwell together in the same pasture. In some cases, from a distance, it might be difficult to distinguish the goats from the sheep. Sproul provides some context:

In ancient Israel ... it was common for sheep and goats to be kept together. But the animals had to be separated on a daily basis. As the evening began to fall, the shepherd would go into his fields and draw all of the goats away because they did not have that wonderful wool sweater to protect them as the temperature began to drop. The goats needed more warmth, so the shepherd would go out and make this separation and bring the goats to a warmer place. The shepherd, of course, was initially familiar with his animals, so he was well able to make that separation. However, Jesus did not suggest He will separate the figurative sheep and goats for some utilitarian reason, as did the shepherds of Israel. Rather, He will separate them so as to place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left, that is, in the place of honor and dishonor respectively.²⁹

At the time of final judgment, Jesus will indeed make the separation. However, until then, the goats and the sheep remain together. The unregenerate dwell among the regenerate.

While this applies to life, work, school, or community, it also pertains to the local church.

Within a local congregation, there are goats and sheep. A pastor, as a shepherd, is called

²⁹ Sproul, *Matthew*, 683.

to “shepherd the flock that is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2). The term flock refers to a collective group of sheep.

Nonetheless, a pastor, as a shepherd, will care for both the goats and the sheep. They will tend to both, ensuring plenty of food, water, and shelter. They will protect against predators. However, tensions and stress arise when the goats, unable to hear the Good Shepherd’s voice, are not joyfully walking in the Lord. They cannot hear God’s Word, for they are unregenerate. They are not His sheep. They might profess Christ as Lord, but exhibit little to no evidence of faith and trust in Jesus. This can cause frustration for pastors. It can cause them to try harder to reach the goats with the Word of God in hopes that they get it, and when there does not seem to be any response, a pastor might be tempted to use coercive or manipulative tactics. After investing heart, time, and care with little to no reaction in response, bitterness, weariness, and burnout can begin.

As to not paint such a black-and-white picture, it is always the hope of all sheep that the goats would be saved, be made new, and join the flock in preparation for the great wedding feast that awaits. Some of the most blessing moments in pastoral ministry are when a goat becomes a sheep for Jesus. Sanctifying change is evidence of their conversion; they enter the waters of baptism, and the angels in heaven rejoice over their repentance (Lk. 15:10).

However, there will remain goats among the sheep in the local church. A task for pastors and church leaders is to prayerfully determine who is a sheep and a goat. An evaluation is needed of the congregation to know how to minister, love, guide, and serve. This can become extremely difficult for many pastors since it might be challenging to distinguish the goats from the sheep if viewed from afar. A pastor must stand in the

middle of the congregation to observe and foster intimate relationships with each individual. A pastor cannot assume that everyone in their congregation is a sheep. Conversely, a pastor cannot assume everyone is a goat, either.

Matthew 13:24-30, Weeds and Wheat

The Parable of the Weeds is another eschatological passage partly felt and experienced in the present. In this last comparison, we will explore the distinctions between the weeds and the wheat. As with the goats and sheep in the previous section, the weeds and the wheat are allowed to grow together until Jesus returns in the final judgment. In the parable, the weeds were planted by an enemy among the wheat. The farmer is asked by his servants what they should do. He wisely explains that to try to rid of the weeds, some of the wheat would also be damaged and ruined. Thus, the harvest would be less. The farmer's instruction was to allow the weeds to grow with the wheat, and at the time of the harvest, the weeds will be gathered first and burned in a fire. Then, the wheat will be collected and placed in the barn.

This passage is often disputed as to who the weeds represent. Do they represent the world, or does this passage apply to the church? R.T. France comments that while this parable may refer to the church at large, he theorizes that it speaks to a broader audience. In 13:36-43, Jesus provides an explanation of the parable to the disciples. In verse 38, France notes that Jesus refers to the field as the "world." The idea is that the weeds represent a sinful and rebellious world as a contrast between the "hiddenness of God's

kingdom and its future consummation of the, when the ‘righteous,’ who are now barely distinguishable from the ‘sons of the evil one’, will ‘shine like the sun’ (v.43).”³⁰

R.C. Sproul also comments on this parable and the fact that the field is referred to as the world in 13:38. However, he states,

This is a possible interpretation, but the rest of the parable is strikingly similar to Jesus’ teaching about the problem that will always exist in the church in this age. We saw Jesus’ dreadful warning in the Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (7:21a). He will say to many who call Him Lord, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (v.23). This warning was given clearly to those who profess faith and are therefore inside the visible church. But though they are inside the church, they are not really in the kingdom.³¹

Either way, the parable addresses the distinction between the unregenerate and the regenerate and that they dwell together. However, Sproul points out that there are those inside the visible church, but not in the kingdom (weeds) versus those in the kingdom (wheat). This division of people within a local church can be problematic for pastors. In the Apostle Paul’s epistles, he exhorts and encourages the churches to strive for unity (Eph. 4:3) in being of “one mind” (Phil. 1:27). The psalmist, when referring to the assembly of God’s people, exclaims, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” in Psalm 133:1. The problem is that it is difficult to have unity when division exists. The Gospel divides. Jesus knew this when he proclaimed in Luke 12:51-53,

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son

³⁰ France, TNTC, 228.

³¹ Sproul, *Matthew*, 388.

against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Just as many homes and relationships are often divided because of the Gospel, so are many churches. A pastor has to biblically, prayerfully, and wisely manage the division in each local church. This is no easy task, especially when the division is between the goats/weeds and sheep/wheat. When conflict is allowed to fester and grow, it can wear the shepherd down over time, even to burnout.

Judging

For a pastor to determine if someone in their congregation is unregenerate or regenerate, an assessment or judgment needs to be made about the person's faith, journey, and character in search of evidence of good fruit that results from a real born again conversion. These judgments and assessments are not condemnations. Instead, they are examinations meant to help identify if an attendee is a potential wolf in sheep's clothing, goat, weed, wheat, or sheep.

Matthew 7:1-6, Judge Not

Today's pastors shepherd in a generation and culture that demands not to be judged. The secular population has, at times, criticized the church for being judgmental. A common argument goes something like this, "Does not your Bible say 'judge not'?" referring to Matthew 7:1 or Luke 6:37. A question for all pastors, and Christians, is what does the Bible say about judging? Before we explore Matthew 7:1-6 in its context, here are a few New Testament passages to consider:

- *John 7:24* – Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.
- *1 Corinthians 2:14-16* – The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be

judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.

- *1 Corinthians 6:2-3* – Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

From these passages, one can observe that Christians are indeed to exercise some sort of judging or judgment. The confusion begins over what it means to judge or make a judgment. In the work of the ministry, pastors should never condemn anyone, for that is the work of the Lord. He alone has the authority to make the final judgment on the Last Day (2 Pet. 3:7-13). In Matthew 7:1, the word judge is translated from the Greek word κρίνω. According to the BDAG, κρίνω can refer to making a judgment of condemnation as in legal or judicial punishment.³² However, and in reference to Matthew 7:1, the BDAG shares that κρίνω can also mean to express an opinion, criticism, or find fault about someone or something.³³

As Jesus brought the Sermon on the Mount to a close, He began the conclusion with a warning to the disciples and whoever was within range to hear, to “Judge not, that you be not judged” in Matthew 7:1. This famous verse and passage have no doubt been among those that are difficult to interpret, even among pastors. In verse 1, Jesus exhorts the disciples not to judge others, so they are not judged. He clarifies this point in verse 2 when He says, “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” In other words, the measure one uses to

³² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 451.

³³ BDAG, 452.

judge will be the same measure that will be used to judge them. In verses 3-4, Jesus continues to expound on his teaching as he addresses the hypocrisy of our own hearts. Ian Duffield contextualizes this in the following way,

The moralizing tendency to judge is strong, and not only in certain forms of religion. It is tempting and too easy to pick faults in others ... The human reality is that there is always something that can be criticized or that does not match up to some illusory perfection. Judging others is easy. We all do it. We can enjoy (or get into the habit of) criticizing others from the comfort of distance or we criticize harshly without moderation or sense of balance those we perceive as “hurting” us. Not judging is what is difficult, as Jesus perceived and why he proclaimed “Judge not” (Mt. 7:1). If we persist in “nit picking” others or criticizing them, Jesus declares, we should not be surprised to find that we will be judged the same way. This is a kind of spiritual *lex talionis*: measure for measure (v. 2b). As we criticize, so will we be criticized. As we judge, so will we be judged.³⁴

Furthermore, Jesus uses a size comparison between the small speck of wood in the other person’s eye versus the larger plank of wood in the one making the judgment. In verse 5, Jesus harshly commands the “hypocrite” to remove the plank, and then one can see the speck in the other person’s eye. Sproul comments on this with important context,

Carpenters were builders of houses, and great strength was required to carry the large wooden beams used to construct the house’s ceilings. The word translated as “plank” referred to one of those very large logs or beams. In contrast, to that beam is a speck of sawdust. Jesus’ point is that someone whose eye is covered by a thick plank cannot see others clearly. He is saying that although each of us is guilty of major sins and failures, we so easily call attention to a tiny blemish in the life of someone else. One reason we direct attention to the speck in someone’s eye is to distract attention away from the plank in our own eye. When we have planks in our eyes, we consider the specks. When we see specks in others’ eyes, we view them as planks. That is how sin destroys human relationships and community, and that is why Jesus is warning us to be careful. If we adopt a judgmental spirit toward others, what goes around is going to come around, and we will be judged.³⁵

³⁴ Ian K. Duffield, “Difficult Texts: Matthew 7.1–6,” *Theology*, 119 no. 2 (March – April 2016): 117-118.

³⁵ Sproul, *Matthew*, 164.

In this context, the question remains, is Jesus teaching his disciples not to judge at all? Or is He making a distinction between judging wrongly and judging rightly? In verse 5, after the plank is removed, Jesus says, “then” you will be able to see the speck in your brother’s eye. This “then” denotes a condition. Once the plank is removed, the person can comment on the speck. Once their own mess has been dealt with, confessed, and repented, they are in a better position to judge rightly. Judging rightly must come from love and truth, not condemnation. To judge rightly requires discernment.

Jesus concludes this passage in verse 6, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” To understand and obey this verse, we need to understand what is holy and what is not. Dogs in Israel were not the cute, fuzzy pets we know today. They were despised as scavengers. They were held in the same regard as pigs in a pigsty. People knew not to give things that were holy to dogs and pigs. Jesus is pointing out that the dogs and pigs are those who hate the kingdom of God. He is not teaching us to hate such people. Instead, as in Matthew 10:11-14, Christians are to wipe the dust off their feet and move on when it is discerned that they do not have ears to hear or eyes to see. We are called to care for people who might be hostile to the kingdom; we must not spend all our time giving them holy things.³⁶

In reference to verse 6 and the passage at large, Duffield provides an exegetical approach to the text,

As Matthew 7:1-5 could be misread to suggest that disciples should exercise no discrimination or discernment, the presence of verse 6 helps connect to correct that interpretation because the proverb suggests that we should be lacking in

³⁶ Sproul, *Matthew*, 164.

common sense to treat dogs and pigs as if they were human by giving them what is holy or precious. Similarly, we can lack common sense in how we deal with people if we exercise no judgment (in the softer sense): discrimination or discernment ... So, to summarize, if Jesus commands us not to judge (i.e. condemn or anathematize) or to be judgmental (especially towards fellow disciples) this does not mean that the disciple is not to judge (i.e. use discernment) or to use critical ability or common sense in dealing with people. However, disciples should certainly be judicious in their dealings with beloved fellow believers and not force that regard as precious on to others (even their pearls of wisdom). The consequences of failing to act in these ways are very unpleasant, as Jesus suggests.³⁷

In the context of pastoral ministry, a shepherd of a local congregation will need to make judgments by discerning and determining the spiritual status of each person in the church. It is an assessment or evaluation to determine how to serve and minister. It should not be done with a critical spirit or in condemnation. Instead, it is done out of love for the person to protect against false conversions or even to protect the rest of the flock. A pastor would do well to heed Jesus' warning about not being hypocritical and to be right with the Lord first. It is a call to humility, confession, and repentance.

Judging rightly will permit pastors to determine better (not perfectly) who is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a goat, a sheep, a weed, wheat, the many, or the few within the local church. If in prayer and out of love for the image bearers of God among them, pastors need not feel guilty for making these assessments, critiques, or evaluations. Lastly, judgments through discernment must be made to "to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them" (Rom. 16:17) and to rebuke those not teaching sound doctrine (Tit. 1:13) as well as to warn divisive people (Tit. 3:10) for the sake of the Gospel and God's elect. It is

³⁷ Duffield, 119.

a weighty aspect of the calling to the pastorate. However, Jesus does not leave his undershepherds to themselves. No, He has sent the Holy Spirit to guide, teach, and comfort.

Pastoral Epistles

First and Second Timothy and Titus have often been referred to as the Pastoral Epistles of Paul. They provide context and an overview regarding the responsibilities of pastors and elders relevant to this project's problem. Much of pastoral ministry is difficult, especially when nurturing, shepherding, and guiding those already in Christ as regenerate, born-again believers. The difficulties can become compounded when trying to shepherd unregenerate people. The Pastoral Epistles deal directly with these challenges. The epistles indeed do not contain a manual for pastoral theology, but their usefulness in the order of ecclesiastical discipline was recognized at an early date.³⁸ Robert Yarbrough shares some context on the pastoral epistles:

In each, a “shepherd” writes to “shepherds” and addresses them squarely in their ecclesial shepherd capacity. But what is a pastor? What exactly does Paul ... hope to encourage in his original readers? One commentator notes, “The Pastorals contain valuable counsel not found elsewhere in the New Testament on how to administer and teach in the church.”³⁹

Much has been written about pastoral ministry. However, since the Word of God is sufficient for all teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16),

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 19.

³⁹ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 1.

an exploration of Scripture is required concerning the responsibilities of pastors and elders in their congregations; dealing with both the regenerate and unregenerate.

1 & 2 Timothy

1 Timothy 1:3-7, The Charge

Immediately at the beginning of Paul's first letter to Timothy, the Apostle instructs his "true child in the faith" to remain in Ephesus for a specific reason. This reason was pastoral in nature. As a shepherd watches over a flock of sheep to protect and care for them, Paul instructs Timothy to stand guard over the church at Ephesus to defend against a different doctrine than what Paul had already taught and to ensure they were not devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which according to Paul promotes speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Donald Guthrie points out that,

Timothy is now reminded that he is himself a man of authority. He has a definite commission to hold the false teachers in check, and it is evident that Paul expects him to take a strong line with them, as is shown in the verb translated *command* (*parangello*), a military term which means literally to pass commands from one to the other.⁴⁰

This pastoral authority and commission extend through the history of the church to our current generation for all pastors and elders called by God to be undershepherds of Jesus Christ. As Guthrie also states, "These words give a timely warning to our modern age against the quest for novelties in Christian teaching." As we already explored, Jesus warned to beware of false prophets and teachers among His people. Wolves in sheep's clothing will try to infiltrate the flock in disguise and often through teaching doctrine that

⁴⁰ Guthrie, 71.

is unsound and certainly not biblical. This is an aspect of the charge to pastors as they stand watch over their local churches. Unregenerate wolves, “certain persons” (verse 3), will try to enter into the fold.

Paul continues his charge to Timothy in the following verse, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (verse 5). This is a command and reminder to all pastors that the aim, the goal, of the calling starts with love that springs from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. In other words, Timothy is being tasked not just with opposing error but with creating space for the flourishing of “love” (*agape*), which connects Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor.⁴¹ Paul provides three aspects from which this love originates.

Guthrie provides a synopsis:

1. *A pure heart.* This is a fundamental requisite. Taken over from the Old Testament, the word heart stands for the totality of man’s moral affections, and without purity there, nobility of character is clearly impossible. Jesus reserved a special promise for the pure in heart (Mt. 5:8).
2. *A good conscience.* The Greek word for conscience (*syneidesis*) indicates literally “joint knowledge”, and came to be used of the facility to distinguish between right and wrong ... By way of contrast, Timothy is later reminded that the apostasizers are those whose consciences are branded (1 Tim. 4:2).
3. *A sincere faith.* Faith which is merely a pretense without solid foundation may well have been evident in the false teachers. What was important was the genuineness of what was professed.⁴²

After explaining the pastoral charge and love, Paul returns to the “certain persons” in verses 6-7, who have wandered into vain discussions and have desires to be

⁴¹ Yarbrough, 105-106.

⁴² Guthrie, 73.

teachers of the law. In addition, they have no understanding, nor can they state or affirm what they believe. A pastor is charged with opposing these people within their congregations while doing so lovingly with a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith. This issue might not seem difficult to address and manage if there is no evidence of false teachers in a specific local ministry context. However, that begins to change when just one false teacher emerges. The difficulties compound even more when two, three, or four appear. An essential thing about wolves is that they often travel in a pack. The pastor and elders are responsible to the flock of sheep in dealing with and addressing this when it becomes an issue. Management of this can be highly stressful and tiring. Thus, this is one of many difficulties pastors face when shepherding in their local churches.

2 Timothy 2:14-26, Do These Things, Avoid Those

In this passage, Paul provides specific instructions to Timothy to guide him in his unavoidable encounters with false teachers.⁴³ In verses 14-15, Timothy is encouraged to promote certain behaviors and actions. However, in verses 16-18, he is warned to avoid other behaviors and actions.

Do these things:

- Verse 14:
 - Remind them of the context of 2 Timothy 2:1-13
 - Do not quarrel about words
- Verse 15:
 - Do your best to present yourself to God as an approved worker
 - Do not be ashamed
 - Rightly handle the word of truth

⁴³ Guthrie, 163-164.

Avoid these things:

- Verses 16-18:
 - Avoid irreverent babble, godless chatter
 - Which promotes ungodliness
 - It will spread like an infectious and contagious disease
 - Paul names two people as examples, Hymenaeus and Philetus
 - These two have swerved from the truth and taught false doctrine (that the resurrection of the saints has already happened)
 - They were upsetting the faith of some

In verse 19, Paul makes a powerful declaration about God’s firm foundation standing against false doctrine and false teachers. He first quotes Numbers 16:5 in making a distinction between those who belong to God (regenerate) and those who do not (unregenerate). Secondly, Paul cites Isaiah 26:13 to illustrate those who name the name of the Lord (regenerate) versus those who do not (unregenerate). Those who belong to the Lord bear His seal of salvation. In these verses, their actions characterize the regenerate and the unregenerate. This connects with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:15-20 on the difference between good trees/bad trees and good fruit/bad fruit. In addition, it seems they are in some sort of community together. Timothy is called to act pastorally and firmly towards the false teachers in the midst of the true believers. You will know them by their fruit. In verses 20-21, Paul further expounds on the distinction between the two types of people found in churches. Guthrie notes, “The focus is upon the cleanliness of each vessel, and this seems preferable to the illustration that indicates the presence of evil members within the church.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Guthrie, 169.

In verses 22-25a, Paul provides another contrasting list of things to pursue versus things to avoid.

- Verse 22:
 - Flee youthful passions
 - Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace
 - Also, pursue *those who call on the Lord from a pure heart* (italics mine)
- Verse 23:
 - Avoid foolish, ignorant controversies, quarrels
- Verse 24:
 - The Lord's servant (Timothy, pastor, elder)
 - Must not be:
 - Quarrelsome
 - Must be:
 - Kind to everyone
 - Able to teach
 - Patiently endure evil
- Verse 25a:
 - Correct opponents with gentleness

In verses 25b-26, Paul, referencing the false and unregenerate teachers, states that God might one day grant them the ability to repent, which requires a change of mind that leads to the knowledge of the truth. In doing so, they will then come to their senses and no longer be held captive by the snares of the devil as ones doing his will. A pastor is called and charged to minister and serve in love, with a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith. The goal is to shepherd in such a way, as a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2:1-13), so that those who are *not* in Christ would indeed come *to* Christ in repentance, having been regenerated by the Lord. Since Paul instructs Timothy to *pursue those who call on the Lord from a pure heart* (v.22), a pastor needs to assess and judge who within their local church calls on the Lord from a pure heart as opposed to one who does not. This is no easy task and adds to pastors' difficulties when shepherding the unregenerate in their congregations.

2 Timothy 3:1-17 and 4:1-8, Miscellanies

These two passages, exegeted together as a whole, provide more pastoral instructions and challenges. As Timothy was called to correct the opponents of sound doctrine, he was also called to oppose those who stir up division while standing on the foundation of the Scriptures he knew and grew up with. There would be those who are not interested in sound doctrine. They would accumulate preachers to meet their ideas, myths, and passions. These are the ungodly unregenerate who caused dissension in the first-century as well as now in this generation. Paul instructs Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort them through preaching “in season and out of season.” This is no easy mission. Timothy’s task is to preach when it is easy and productive and also when it is not.⁴⁵ In dealing with this difficult task, Paul encourages Timothy to be sober-minded and to endure the hardships. “The Christian minister must seek to cultivate an unruffled alertness in every aspect of his work. There is no circumstance in which this does not apply. It is particularly demanding.”⁴⁶

Titus

Titus 1:5-16, Qualifications and Duties

Paul explains in this passage why he left Titus in Crete. Titus was to put into order what remained and to appoint elders as he traveled to the towns Paul directed him to visit in what seemed like a church planting mission. As part of this mission, Paul provides Titus with the qualifications and characteristics of pastors and elders. The list in

⁴⁵ Yarborough, 436.

⁴⁶ Guthrie, 186.

this epistle is similar to that of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Both are often used in churches as the standard to call and elect pastors and elders. Here is an outline of the list in Titus 1:6-9:

Pastor/elder is to be:

- Above reproach
- Husband of one wife
- His children are believers and not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient
- He must not be arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, or greedy
- He must be hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined
- He must hold firm to sound teaching/doctrine, give instruction in it, and rebuke those who contradict it

A pastor/elder is a steward of God (1:7) as one who is entrusted with the Lord's work. As such, whoever holds a position of Christian responsibility must similarly be beyond reproach to serve as a true example to others.⁴⁷ Some have referred to pastoral ministry as a "higher calling" because of the qualifications required and the weightiness of the calling. A good reminder is that it is God who calls pastors into the ministry and life (Eph. 4:11). As a steward of the Lord and his Word, a pastor is charged with and given the authority to rebuke those who are rebellious, empty talkers and deceivers (v.10) within the church they are called to serve. Paul goes on to instruct in verse 11 that these people must be silenced because what they are teaching is upsetting entire families. They are teaching what ought not to be taught. In other words, they teach doctrine not aligned with the Gospel and God's truth. While the context of this passage is directed to Titus and toward those in Crete for whom Paul shows some sense of disdain (v.12), it is a universal truth and instruction for the church as a whole. There are those in local

⁴⁷ Guthrie, 206.

churches in our modern era, as well as throughout the history of the church, who have not been of one mind with the Gospel and sound doctrine. A pastor is rightfully in the position to rebuke this when it occurs so that, hopefully, the person(s) will receive the correction and grow in their understanding of the faith (v.13-14) while turning away from false teachings and myths. This goal is restoration if possible.

Paul states that false teachers need to be rebuked *sharply* (v.13). Yarbrough says, “Paul underscores this action with the adverb ‘sharply,’ a word used elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Cor 13:10 ... Titus must leave no doubt but rather be decisive, forthright, and persistent in laying out the truth regarding what the troublemakers are twisting.”⁴⁸ In thinking through these situations in pastoral ministry, a judgment must be made by asking a few questions such as:

- Who is the person perpetuating the false teachings or rebellion?
- Are they a member of the church?
- Have they been born again as a regenerate new creation Christ?
- Does this person exhibit evidence that he/she might be a wolf in sheep’s clothing?
- What are the possible motives or intent behind their actions?
- Do they have a heart for Jesus and the truth, but maybe they are simply confused or unknowledgeable?

The answers to some of these questions can only come from addressing the person directly through conversation, which for some pastors might seem like unwanted conflict. It might appear easier to avoid it and pray that the problem goes away. In doing that, the true sheep in the flock of Christ are left to fend for themselves without a shepherd to guard and protect them.

⁴⁸ Yarbrough, 497.

In the final section of this passage, Paul turns his attention to the unbelievers in verses 15-16. In verse 15, he speaks first about those who are in Christ, the pure. To them, all things are pure. Guthrie points out that this is “an echo of Jesus own words in Luke 11:41 (cf. also Mark 7:15), and Paul has partially expounded the same idea in Romans 14:20.”⁴⁹ The idea is that it is not what one takes in that defiles them. Rather, it is what comes about that makes one unclean. In verse 15, to the true believers in Christ, “those sanctified by faith, Paul and Titus’s teaching in its fullness is perfectly ‘pure.’”⁵⁰

Conversely, to the unbelieving and defiled, nothing in them is pure. Paul states that both their minds and their consciences are defiled. Yarbrough shares,

Nothing is “pure” for these persons. They do not affirm the apostolic message, which creates a domino effect that skews their judgment across the board. It is not just their counsel and political influence in Cretan churches that is a problem: “both their minds and consciences are corrupted.” Their behavior is pervasively self-destructive ... Since these corrupted individuals do not accept the gospel, their consciences cannot derive the benefit of righteousness that the gospel believed imparts.⁵¹

Rebuking this sort of behavior and actions within a local church setting can be an arduous task. A pastor must spend time, energy, and resources (spiritual and mental) addressing such situations. The hope, it would seem, is that these types of conflicts and problems rarely occur. However, what if a pastor is faced with these more frequently? How long would it take for frustration, bitterness, resentment, and burnout to set in? Since each situation is unique, it does not seem possible to quantify answers to these critical

⁴⁹ Guthrie, 210.

⁵⁰ Yarbrough, 500.

⁵¹ Yarbrough, 501-502.

questions. Nonetheless, the need to rebuke false teachers does occur, and they can add to the difficulties pastors already endure in their ministries.

Lastly, in verse 16, Paul concludes his descriptive analysis of the unbelieving troublemakers. First, they profess to know God; they claim to know Him. However, their actions do not line up with their profession. The problem is that their actions constitute a betrayal of their confession.⁵² Referring back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, they produce bad fruit from a bad tree. In addition, Paul seems to connect what Jesus taught about those who say "Lord, Lord" and do works in His name only to have the Lord of lords declare to them at the final judgment, "depart from me I never knew you" (Mt. 7:21-23). Paul states that they are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work. These are people that pastors, whether often or not, will encounter within their congregations.

Titus 3:1-11, Regeneration

Since much of the research and focus of this project pertains to the terms regenerate and unregenerate, an exegetical exploration into the theological significance is needed. The Greek word *παλιγγενεσία* (*palingenesia*), regeneration, (Tit. 3:5) occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only at Mt. 19:28, where Jesus describes human transformation at the resurrection of the righteous.⁵³ The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* provides more contextual information:

Deriving from *palin* and *genesis*, and thus meaning either a. "return to existence" or b. "renewal of higher existence," this word takes its distinctive impress from Stoicism with a cosmic and then an individual sense. It then spreads to educated

⁵² Yarbrough, 502.

⁵³ Yarbrough, 546.

circles with a more general reference, and occurs later in the mysteries, though not Orphic or Pythagorean writings. Philo has it for restoration of life and the reconstitution of the world after the flood, and Josephus for the reestablishment of the people after the exile, but the only LXX [Greek Septuagint] instance is in Job 14:14. In Judaism existence in the new aeon is not just a repetition of this life but an existence in righteousness following the definitive crisis of the last judgment.

In Tit. 3:5 the term embraces both moral renewal and new life, but with a stress on the latter (cf. v.7). The grace of God works here by instruction and personal fellowship, not by magical incantation, hence the origin of the use is to be found in the Jewish adaptation of Stoicism, not in the mysteries.⁵⁴

A theological connection with Titus 3:5 is found in John 3:3, where Jesus explained to Nicodemus that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” To be born again, or born from above (ἀνωθεν), is the same concept as being regenerated. Another connection is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, where Paul asserts that those in Christ, in union with Him, are new creations. The old self is gone, and the new self has come. Lastly, in Colossians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:4-8, believers in Christ were once dead in their trespasses, but it was God who made them alive. How can someone who is dead make themselves alive? They cannot. Regeneration, and rebirth, are the sole work of God in the life of the person.

In Paul’s epistle to Titus, he illustrates a contrast between those who were unregenerate, those not born again, new creations, along with some defining characteristics (3:3), and those who were regenerated in verses 4-8. In verse 5, Paul explains that those who have been made new in Christ have been saved not because of their own righteousness or works but through God’s mercy. The work of the Holy Spirit did this through the washing of regeneration and renewal. As heirs in God’s family, the

⁵⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromley, *Palingenesia-Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 118-119.

regenerated believers are to devote themselves to good works, which are excellent and profitable for people. “These affirmations are particularly to be directed towards those who have trusted in God, for as true belief is an indispensable basis for the right ordering of conduct.”⁵⁵ Again, these good works and “right ordering of conduct” refer to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7 and the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

In Titus 3:9-11, Paul provides Titus with similar instructions Timothy received as to what to avoid, things that are unprofitable and worthless, such as foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law. Lastly, Titus was to avoid people who caused and stirred up division. The condition Paul sets forth is to warn the divisive person once to offer an opportunity to repent and change. If it continues without change and a second warning is given, Paul strongly exhorts Titus “to have nothing more to do with” the person. Their lack of love, desire for unity, and repentance is a condition of an unregenerate heart, for they are warped, sinful, and self-condemned.

As a measure to protect the purity of the church, pastors must address and, if need be, remove those who insist on teaching false doctrine and stir up division within the community of saints. The lack of repentance and obedience to God’s Word can be characteristics of those who are unregenerate but yet; attend worship services or other church-related events. In their unregenerate state, they cannot discern spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:6-16). In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). This can be frustrating and taxing for pastors who have hearts for

⁵⁵ Guthrie, 229.

everyone in their congregations. Yet, the truth remains that the many, wolves, goats, and weeds will be within each congregation in the midst of the few, sheep, and wheat.

The biblical passages explored reveal much about the dynamics of the different groups of people found within local congregations. The theme of the “many and the few” was not studied to determine how many people at a local church are truly born again versus those who are not. It is not about numbers and statistics. Instead, it sheds light on the truth that, most likely, not everyone in attendance has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and that they are still dead in their sins. In addition, and thinking quantitatively, it is possible that those who are regenerate in a local congregation are not as many as one might assume. Jesus taught his followers to look for the good tree bearing good fruit. In looking for this fruit, a pastor must perform some sort of judgment or evaluation of those in attendance to determine who are the wolves, goats, sheep, weeds, and wheat. This judgment is not condemnation, nor is it to be done lightly. Instead, pastors must first address their own sins and issues before the Lord, and then they can judge rightly in humility and love with a sincere faith and good conscience.

Scripture teaches that pastoral authority is to be exercised and practiced to protect the regenerate sheep, the purity of the church, and to rid of unrepentant false teachers and those who stir up division. These tasks can be difficult and challenging as well as stressful and time-consuming. When Peter exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock that is among you” in 1 Peter 5:2, he asserts that the flock refers to those in Christ. This responsibility by itself is weighty and difficult at times. Now, insert problems and stressors in dealing with those who are not (might not be) in Christ. If problems, tensions, and conflict are not dealt with biblically, as was explored, pastors might find themselves

heading towards or to the point of burnout. In the next chapter, secondary literature sources have been examined and analyzed to gain better insight into cultural christian perspectives on regeneration, evangelism in a post-Christian culture, and pastoral challenges.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW RELATING TO CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON REGENERATION, PASTORAL CHALLENGES, AND EVANGELISM

In this chapter, literature was explored and analyzed regarding the problem and response statement of the project. Pastors face an extensive range of difficulties in ministry. Some of these are cultural perspectives often brought into the local church from the unbelieving world. It becomes difficult for pastors to address these with truth while shepherding people to Jesus Christ. A post-Christian America has introduced new challenges for pastors, from the doctrine of regeneration to evangelism and discipleship. Lastly, pastoral burnout is becoming an increasing threat and reality as pastors struggle to fulfill God’s calling in their lives.

Regeneration: Cultural Christian Perspective

Cultural Christianity

According to a research poll by Barna Group in 2015, more Americans identify as “post-Christian.” The percentage increased from 37 percent in 2013 to 44 percent in 2015. “Across the United States, cities in every state are becoming more post-Christian—some at a faster rate than others ... some factors used to gauge categories included ‘whether individuals identify as atheist, have never made a commitment to Jesus, have not attended church in the last year, or have not read the Bible in the last week.’”⁵⁶ Yet

⁵⁶ Ray Nothstine, “Are You Living in Post-Christian America?,” Christian Post, August 13, 2015, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/are-you-living-in-a-post-christian-america.html>.

the poll also revealed that 78 percent of Americans identify as Christian. This data shows confusion about what it means to be a born again, regenerate believer in Christ. American culture, instead of the Word of God, has increasingly been influencing what it means to be a Christian. A Gallup poll from 2022 revealed a record low of 20 percent of Americans now say the Bible is the literal Word of God, down from 24 percent the last time the question was asked in 2017 and half of what it was at its high points in 1980 and 1984.⁵⁷

These alarming trends are being felt in American churches. Dr. Albert Mohler, the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains,

Ignorance of the Bible isn't just a problem in our culture. It's a problem in the church, and it's scandalous. While America's evangelical Christians are rightly concerned about the secular worldview's rejection of biblical Christianity, we ought to give some urgent attention to a problem much closer to home—biblical literacy in the church ... Only half of all Christian adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the twelve disciples. According to data from the Pew Research Center, nearly half don't recognize that the Golden Rule is not one of the Ten Commandments ... Christians who lack biblical knowledge are the products of churches that place too little value on biblical knowledge. Paul's words to Timothy are as valuable today as ever: "Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13). Bible teaching now often accounts for only a diminishing fraction of the local congregation's time and attention. And while the increasing emphasis on small group ministry has certainly increased opportunities for fellowship, many of these groups never get beyond superficial Bible study ... Even the pulpit has been sidelined in many congregations. Preaching has taken a back seat to other concerns in corporate worship. The centrality of biblical preaching to the formation of disciples is lost, and Christian ignorance leads to Christian indolence and worse.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Frank Newport, "Fewer in U.S. Now See Bible as Literal Word of God," Gallup, July 6, 2022, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394262/fewer-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>.

⁵⁸ Albert Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy," May 1, 2017, <https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/scandal-biblical-illiteracy/>.

The lack of biblical knowledge and understanding is a product of a larger issue relating to culture. The terms “cultural Christianity” or “cultural Christians” have been used more so recently to identify those who self-proclaim to be Christian but lack evidence of faith, godly fruit, a hunger for God’s Word, and regeneration. Dean Inserra provides a definition,

Cultural Christianity: a religion that, I believe, is practiced by more Americans than any other faith or religion. Its participants can be found in Catholic or Protestant churches, in the South and Midwest, on high school football fields, at patriotic celebrations, and around family dinner tables. It looks and sounds very Christian on the surface, but is merely Christian by culture, rather than conviction. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not part of the equation ... Cultural Christianity admires Jesus, but doesn’t really think he is needed, except to “take the wheel” in a moment of crisis. The Jesus of Cultural Christianity is a type of historical imaginary friend with some magic powers for good luck and sentimentality. “Amazing Grace” is a song known from memory, but why that grace is amazing cannot be explained. The God of Cultural Christianity is the “big man upstairs,” and whether or not He is holy and people have sinned against him is irrelevant. Words such as “hope,” “faith,” and “believe” hang on the walls of living rooms as decorations, but the actual words of God only come around when Psalm 23 is read at a loved one’s funeral.⁵⁹

After commenting on Matthew 7:3-14 and those who enter through the wide and easy gate that leads to destruction, Inserra continues,

This reality calls us to missional urgency to reach those in our services who are comfortable with Christian lingo but have no understanding of the truth. The message remains: no saving faith exists apart from commitment to Jesus Christ and belief in His gospel. While the number of those who check “No Religion” on a survey might be rising, politicians still invoke vague language about God in their speeches to appease the millions of Americans who get goosebumps singing “God Bless America” at baseball games. This god they are singing of, however, functions more like a national mascot than a God who demands our faith and repentance. The church must awaken to the reality that this is a false gospel with eternal consequences. Cultural Christianity is a mindset that places one’s security in heritage, values, rites of passage (such as a first communion or a baptism from childhood), and a generic deity, rather than the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁹Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2019), 13-14.

These false gospels pose serious challenges to pastors and local church members who are seeking to live on mission and remain faithful to the Great Commission where the Lord has them living, working, and being part of a local church.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, these false gospels have made their way into many churches across the country. Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile shares his experiences regarding these challenges by revealing that about forty percent of those he interviewed for membership in his local church admitted that they did not understand the Gospel when they were members. Furthermore, they stated they had not been converted.⁶¹ These were unregenerate members of a Christian church who were interviewed and permitted to join the ranks of the converted and born again saints at some point. They lacked a basic understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, they claimed to have been Christians, ones who believed in a different, false gospel.

A common false gospel in American churches has been titled “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” This term was devised by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in their book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.⁶² Dr. Mohler summarizes the principles of this concept:⁶³

1. “A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.”
2. “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.”

⁶⁰ Inserra, 8.

⁶¹ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 48.

⁶² Inserra, 37.

⁶³ Albert Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion,” April 29, 2005, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/04/29/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religionbest-of-albert-mohler-program-from-04112005>.

3. “The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.”
4. “God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.”
5. “Good people go to heaven when they die.”

Inserra notes that even though these principles align closely with the beliefs of many Americans, most people have never self-identified as “moral deists.” Instead, they refer to themselves as “Christians.”⁶⁴ These unbiblical beliefs are brought into churches under the guise of Christianity by those whom the Holy Spirit has not regenerated.

In addition, one’s identity in Christ or self-proclamation as a Christian should not be rooted in their nationality, political affiliation, or even which denomination they belong to. The media has perpetuated the notion that Christianity can be defined by how someone votes in elections, whether or not they are republican or democrat, conservative, moderate, or liberal. The phrase “conservative white evangelical Christians” is often mentioned as a voting class in the news and election polls.⁶⁵ The Bible does not make this distinction. Instead, in Galatians 3:28, the Apostle Paul taught that there are no boundaries and limits about race or status regarding salvation and Christ’s finished work on the cross. Furthermore, in a vision in Revelation 7:9, the Apostle John sees the multitude of saints in heaven worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. These born again believers were from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.” There is no distinction in the body of Christ as all will be united in Him. A true regenerate believer’s identity is rooted solely and firmly as a child of God in Christ Jesus.

⁶⁴ Inserra, 37.

⁶⁵ Frank Newport, “Religious Group Voting and the 2020 Election,” Gallup News, November 13, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/324410/religious-group-voting-2020-election.aspx>.

The lack of a solid biblical worldview has crept into local churches. A secularization is occurring in America's congregations in which the culture is now influencing American Christianity resulting in an increased mixture of unregenerate and regenerate members. Ben Edwards explains,

The problem of worldliness is an ever present issue for the church. While it is important to warn individual believers against worldliness, it is also vital for local churches to avoid this danger. Why do local churches so often blend in with the world? Local churches are too often composed of a mixed company of regenerate and unregenerate members. The problem in these cases is not that believers are living like the world but that the world, in the form of unbelievers, has been granted membership in the church. It may be true at times that the church is like the world because born-again Christians are continuing to live as though they had never been born again. But it is also likely that the church is like the world because unconverted people have infiltrated the church. The remedy for this problem is to keep the world out of the church by guarding the membership of the local church.⁶⁶

This becomes challenging when a pastor receives a call to shepherd a church that consists of unregenerate and regenerate members. The researcher has experienced that in some cases, the unregenerate members have been on the rolls for years and even decades. They have been rooted firmly into the foundation of the operations and activities of the church. This is problematic for pastors as they try to shepherd and navigate the congregation towards biblical worship, preaching, and teaching. As much as a pastor might want to reset the membership, requiring all current members to meet with the church leaders to reshare salvation testimonies and reapply for membership, often this is not feasible or possible. As Edwards points out, church membership must be guarded and kept for the

⁶⁶ Ben Edwards, "Keeping the Church Distinct from the World through Regenerate Church Membership," Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, October 11, 2013, <https://dbts.edu/2013/10/11/keeping-the-church-distinct-from-the-world-through-regenerate-church-membership-2/>.

true born again believers, which can prove extremely difficult. However, Edwards encourages churches to practice biblical church discipline. He states,

Though often ignored or neglected today, church discipline is a necessary and important aspect of the local church. Jesus instructed that those who refuse to repent of a sin against a brother, after being confronted privately, plurally, and publicly, should be treated as an unbeliever and put out of the church (Matt 18:15-20). False teachers, though they may arise from within the church, must be avoided by believers (Acts 20:28-30; Rom 16:16-17) ... When a church fails to practice church discipline, it allows unbelievers to remain firmly entrenched within its ranks. Thus the purity of the church is lost and its distinction from the world is blurred. Though discipline is always a difficult step for a church, it must be taken to keep the church from becoming like the world.⁶⁷

Pastors are often leading out in front in these matters. As Edwards shares, church discipline is not an easy task. This is true for just one instance. However, it becomes compounded further when multiple instances need to be dealt with, especially when dealing with an unregenerate person who is not able to hear and heed the biblical command and purpose behind the process. Nonetheless, church discipline is required and must be practiced. Edwards shares the results of neglecting to practice it:

The neglect of church discipline has been one of the leading causes of the growing worldliness of the church. Since worldiness is not just external action but an issue of the control of the heart, churches must warn those who are not living their lives with Christ at the center that they need to repent or be put out of the fellowship of the church. The world must be removed from the church, for continued worldly practice reveals an unregenerate heart: Myriads of so-called Christians today think like the world. They may appear morally decent, but Christ is not the focus of their lives. They are at home in this world and lack a passionate commitment to Christ and His Great Commission. They forget that when the worldly man thinks he has conquered the world, the world has conquered him. Then he is no longer salt and light in the world, and provides evidence that he is not born again after all. (Joel R. Beeke, *Overcoming the World: Grace to Win the Daily Battle*, 37) ... Often, the problem is not that regenerated people continually

⁶⁷ Edwards, 2013.

live like the world but that unregenerate people are allowed to continue to live in the church.⁶⁸

As worldly culture infiltrates local churches, the church is called to infiltrate and influence the culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as covered in chapter two in the following statement. The laborers of Christ (the regenerate) are called to go out into the world to work the harvest (the proclamation of the Good News) as ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21). For pastors, this requires faithfully preaching the Word of God. Edwards makes a point not to assume that the current members of the church are truly regenerate and understand the Gospel. Pastors should continually explain the true nature of salvation and warn against the danger of false professions.⁶⁹

All this poses an extreme challenge for pastors as they tend to the unregenerate in their congregations. As Inserra points out, “Getting someone who thinks he’s a Christian to see that he is actually *not* is a delicate and sensitive endeavor, but not unique to our time.”⁷⁰ Jesus often, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount, addressed those who were religious but unrepentant. Nonetheless, pastors are not Jesus, and this is no easy task. How does a pastor lovingly show a goat they are not a sheep? For some, merely attending worship services proves they are a “Christian.” They might read the Bible on occasion or pray at times. They might even be members of a local church making decisions about worship and other theological matters without the indwelling Holy Spirit,

⁶⁸ Edwards, 2013.

⁶⁹ Edwards, 2013.

⁷⁰ Inserra, 15.

which supports the case for regenerate membership and the requirement for sharing one's salvation testimony of being born again.

It has been the researcher's experience that cultural Christians will often claim they are in Christ. Yet, when asked if they are "born again," there is a hesitation or unwillingness to make that proclamation. Scripture teaches there is only one kind of Christian, one who has been born again and regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:3-8). An unregenerate person cannot speak of being born again because God has not changed the disposition of their heart. R.C. Sproul explains,

To be "born again" is to experience a second genesis. It is a new beginning, a fresh start in life. When something is started, we say that it is generated. If it is started again, it is regenerated. The Greek verb *geniauo* that is translated as "generate" means "to be", "to become", or "to happen." Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is a change. It is a radical change into a new kind of being. To be regenerated does not mean that we are changed from a human being into a divine being. It does mean that we are changed from spiritually dead human beings into spiritually alive human beings. Spiritually dead persons are incapable of seeing the kingdom of God. It is invisible to them, not because this kingdom itself is invisible, but because the spiritually dead are also spiritually blind.⁷¹

Christianity is all about change. God is making all things new (Rev. 21:5), including those who have been born again. This sanctifying change is evident in the believer's life for the witness of God's grace and glory. One must be born again, having been changed and in a continuous state of being changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many cultural Christians cannot speak about this sanctifying change in their lives because they are unregenerate. This disconnect between biblical doctrine and a theology located in culture is a matter of eternal life and death. So again, the question remains, how can a pastor lovingly show someone who thinks they are saved that they might not be? False

⁷¹ R.C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, 77-78.

conversions and false assurances of salvation are serious and dangerous matters. Sproul points out that,

If we are regenerate, God has given us peace and security. He does not give us a fragile truce so that the next time we slip up He starts rattling His sword again. The battle is over. We are forgiven and cleansed. We are justified. We are now being sanctified. Remember, sanctification is as much by faith as justification. Trust in Christ's finished work. That's where our assurance comes from: not out of arrogant self-appraisal, but trusting Christ to keep us and fully save us.⁷²

This peace and assurance of salvation can only come from Jesus Christ and what He has done on the cross and in the resurrection. This is to be received by faith and in repentance. Cultural Christianity tends to place the assurance of one's salvation on what the person has done or is doing as a matter of works, identity, or beliefs versus what Christ has done. This can be witnessed in some denominations where baptism is considered a rite of passage into the family of God. Inserra notes, "In Cultural Christianity, it is common for one to see himself as being born into Christianity rather than actually being born again. This false understanding is often cultivated in traditional Christian rites of passage ... The probability is that a Cultural Christian will believe that participating in these rites of passage places them in good standing with God."⁷³ The theological position of the EFCA is that there is no salvific result of baptism. Instead, baptism is one of two ordinances (the other being the Lord's Supper) that are practiced *because* a regenerate believer has already been saved by God's grace. *Evangelical Convictions* states,

The description of the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper as "ordinances" reflects their source—they come to us by way of an authoritative order, a

⁷² R.C. Sproul, *Growing in Holiness: Understanding God's Role and Yours* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), 87.

⁷³ Inserra, 59-60.

mandate, from the Lord Jesus Himself ... The ordinances are not means to salvation, but this does not mean they are devoid of any spiritual benefit ... Again, we stress that the ordinances are not efficacious in and of themselves. They do not edify apart from the subjective spiritual response which they both presuppose and foster—what we call here “genuine faith.” These are signs which point us to the reality of the gospel. We must not confuse the two. It is through faith in Christ alone, not our participation in these ordinances, that we are saved ... We first describe the ordinance of baptism, and we discuss it as it was most clearly practiced in the New Testament—as an act involving believers. We present a theology of baptism that all Evangelical churches could affirm when baptizing professing believers.⁷⁴

There is often confusion and a lack of understanding between Cultural Christianity and Biblical Christianity. Pastors must preach and teach sound doctrine and the Gospel to combat the many false gospels which have made their way into modern American Christianity. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

Cheap Grace

In addition, and in conjunction with the dangers of cultural Christianity, pastors also face the threats of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer referred to as cheap grace. Pastors care about their flock’s souls and know that true discipleship with Jesus requires denying self and things. Living a Christian life of faith is not an easy journey, and there is nothing cheap or easy about it. Consequently, pastors are often faced with the difficulties of addressing and lovingly guiding people away from this harmful and misleading concept of Christianity. Robbie Castleman shares,

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. It is grace without price: grace without cost! ... Cheap grace as a doctrine ... an intellectual assent ... Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner ... Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without

⁷⁴ Strand, 166-169.

confession ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.⁷⁵

Castleman also states,

Bonhoeffer's idea of 'cheap grace' is flourishing in our churches, on our campuses, in our homes, and we don't even see it for what it is. Salvation is sold as fire insurance, Jesus is reduced to correct propositional formulas and worship is all about us and the way we like it no matter how many times we sing, 'it's all about you, Jesus.' Cheap grace sells us a comfortable Jesus to whom we sing affectionate valentines. Cheap grace substitutes the fear of the Lord for a fear of the world. Cheap grace hides our light under wonderfully pious lampshades, and cheap grace renders salt of the earth as just so much tasteless landfill.⁷⁶

Castleman goes on to share two main reactions his students experience when reading Bonhoeffer's book *Cost of Discipleship* and when reading his commentary on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The first reaction is anger. The anger, he states, stems from the students not knowing or having heard the biblical truth of the Gospel as a gift and its demands. He says, "They know every lyric from the top ten on the 'CCM' scene (Contemporary Christian Music), but they don't know the Scriptures. The worship services they attend are in fact just really good Christian meetings, designed to promote the organization and please the hoped for crowd. The aim is just to make sure the music connects and that no one ends up fearing the Lord. Be comfortable, not confronted."⁷⁷

The second reaction is often radical repentance. With ears to hear and eyes to see Matthew 7, they begin to experience what it means to be the few on the hard path that

⁷⁵ Robbie Castleman, "The Skim Milk Gospel of Cheap Grace," *Themelios*, 30 no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 52.

⁷⁶ Castleman, 52.

⁷⁷ Castleman, 53.

have entered by the narrow gate. There is good fruit.⁷⁸ Pastors must stand up against cultural Christianity and cheap grace in the power of the Holy Spirit and preach the whole counsel of God while understanding the “aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Difficulties and tensions can arise when pastors experience push back from those within their congregations for preaching the truth of God’s Word. One thing to be mindful of is that it is not the pastor who saves. Instead, it is Jesus. The pastor is to walk in obedience to the King and proclaim the Gospel no matter how popular or unpopular, offensive, or hard it might be to hear. The Holy Spirit is at work in the world, and all pastors, elders, and church leaders must be reminded of His mission. Dr. John Walvoord shares,

The entire work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the unsaved world is sometimes given the terminology common grace, including in its scope the restraining work of the Holy Spirit in addition to the work of revealing the Gospel ... The work of the Holy Spirit revealing the Gospel to the unsaved is, therefore, an important aspect of a larger program of God in dealing with the need of a lost world ... The doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Gospel to the world is most important not only in its relation to the plan of God but also in carrying out effectively the preaching of the Gospel. The Christian desiring to win souls for Christ should study this subject carefully, for in it lie the principles which God has revealed concerning His methods of dealing with the lost.⁷⁹

Evangelism in a Post-Christian Culture

Pastors face new challenges in America as the Christian influence on the culture has continued to wane. Methods and strategies for evangelism and discipleship that were once employed might have a different effect than they once had. Evangelism has

⁷⁸ Castleman, 53.

⁷⁹ John F. Walvoord, “The Holy Spirit in Relation to the Unsaved World,” *Bibliotheca sacra*, 98 no. 390 (April - June 1941): 160-161.

primarily been understood as kingdom work outside of the walls of a church building, and this has changed. Discipleship programs and strategies once meant to edify believers, have been aimed at the unregenerate. These new challenges can add to the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate in their congregations.

Evangelism or Discipleship

In 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, the Apostle states that all Christians are ambassadors for Christ and ministers of reconciliation. The charge is to bring the message of reconciliation, the Gospel, to the unsaved world. Jesus commanded this in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15 when He said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” The idea of evangelism is one of “going,” as in to go outside of the church into the world to bring the saving message of the Good News. While this is undoubtedly true theologically, what about those inside the church whom the Holy Spirit has not regenerated? For many reasons, these folks attend worship services and other church-related activities. Yet, after an examination or conversation, standing on the biblical standards of evaluation, it becomes clear they are not in Christ and have not been born again. The pastor, and hopefully other believers in the congregation, must then evangelize the unregenerate. Often, the practice of evangelism is focused outside of the church building and out in the community. If it is true that there are unregenerate people attending worship services, then evangelism is needed within the walls of the church buildings as well. Pastors simply cannot just attempt to implement discipleship programs and strategies. There needs to be some essence of evangelism. Benjamin Phillips states,

Christ’s command clearly entails the work of evangelism as the way in which a person comes to the faith in Christ that leads them to baptism as their first act of Christian obedience. Yet the disciple-making that starts with evangelism does not

end there ... The Great Commission certainly connects evangelism and discipling in sequential order—one is not yet obedient to Christ if one has not come to Him in penitent faith for salvation! Yet more must be said about the relationship between these two elements of the Great Commission. Evangelism addresses those who are enslaved to sin and not yet saved—those outside the church. Discipling, both constructive and corrective, addresses those who are reaching for Christlikeness because they are saved—those inside the church. The common denominator is that both evangelism and discipling serve to resolve the problem of sin in the lives of people.⁸⁰

While Philipps correctly addresses the distinction and similarity between evangelism and disciple-making, he paints a black-and-white picture about local churches. The first step in making a disciple is evangelism. This does not pertain to just outside the church building, such as in homes, the community, or the workplace. This also includes *within* the congregations of local churches. Phillipps also states, “Our labor is forming Christlikeness in people is most commonly called ‘discipling’ (Gal 4:19; Matt 28:19-20). What we are about is the transformation of our depraved characters into the character of Christ, the replacement of vice and virtue—in short, exchanging ugliness for beauty.”⁸¹ Theologically, this transformation is called sanctification, to be set apart and made holy. This lifelong process follows a one-time justification when God declares a sinner as not guilty because of faith and what Jesus accomplished on the cross in the substitutionary atonement. An unregenerate person cannot be sanctified or transformed, for this is the work of the Holy Spirit. An unregenerate person does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

⁸⁰ Benjamin B. Phillipps, “The Attraction of Beauty in an Ugly World: On the Relationship of Discipling and Evangelism,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 50 no. 2 (Spring 2008): 172.

⁸¹ Phillipps, 171, 175.

Post-Christian Culture

After setting the framework for evangelism within a local church congregation, some attention is needed to address some of the difficulties pastors experience in a post-Christian culture. In speaking about postmodernity and naturalistic realism, Bruce Little states,

Today, we are witnessing the West's attempt to maintain social order without any intellectual/spiritual foundation sufficient for such a task. It is an attempt to have social order without spiritual order. The search for meaning has turned inward, and mankind has lost his external reference point—God. Consequently, today's intellectual world courts two competing visions of reality that make the idea of God either unnecessary or implausible. First, there is the anti-realism of what is called postmodernity, where everyone is her own authority and personal happiness is the goal of living. Second, there is anti-metaphysical realism, which is the scientific vision of reality. This affirms objective reality but denies anything existing above experience, which, in the words of Richard Weaver, means that "man is the measure of all things." Mankind is his own guide as well as his goal.⁸²

Little goes on to say that we must understand what this all means for speaking to the post-Christian mind. This includes those who enter our local churches seeking something more significant in life. Ecclesiastes 12:3 states, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Pastors are faced with helping those who are human-centered see that reality and all things in life are actually God-centered. The duty of man is not happiness and life goals. Instead, as Scripture teaches, it is worship, faith, and obedience to the Lord God Almighty. An unregenerate, natural person cannot know or see the spiritual things of God (1 Cor. 2:12-16), for they are of the world, and in America, that world is becoming more post-Christian.

⁸² Bruce A. Little, "Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society," *Southeastern Theological Review*, 9 no. 2 (Fall 2018): 5.

This shift in American society has brought a fading sense of the sacred. Little explains,

... all that is left is nature—a nature that has been demystified, something under our control. Now science alone defines mankind and tells us what is important ... The loss of the sacred has robbed humanity of any sustaining sense of significance and worth. Beyond this, the loss of the sacred means death to the transcendent categories of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. One cannot fail to see the ugliness all about us and feel the oppression of the repudiation of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful ... In general, it is not difficult to see where the loss of the sacred has led. For instance, marriage and even life itself are devalued on every hand. Everything is common. Respect, honor, and heroism are empty concepts, and hope rests in technology alone. We must resist the temptation to offer Christianity on functionalistic grounds—for example, that it gives you a better marriage or makes you a better worker. That may be true, but it is not the heart of the gospel. If we do that to fit with the intellectual form of the day, we must acknowledge we are betraying our own vision of reality, which is to say our view of truth. When we fall prey to the functionalist view (not principle, but in deed/method), we make Christianity just another new product on the market to be tried for increased sociological functional value.⁸³

Furthermore, the loss of the sacred is seen in a lack of general reverence for God that was once more common in our society. Little explains that the loss of the sacred has also removed the idea of mankind's moral guilt before God. In this post-Christian worldview, there is no sense of offending a higher power because none exists. Those who believe this must first hear the bad news, that they are sinners who violate a holy God, before hearing the Good News of saving faith in Jesus Christ.⁸⁴ This all leads back to the evangelism that must be done, not just out in the world but also in the local church. Pastors face a unique set of challenges as those who come in off the streets and attend worship services are likely to bring with them a post-Christian worldview. This again speaks to the biblical

⁸³ Little, 13.

⁸⁴ Little, 13.

truth that born again Christians must be workers of the harvest going out into the world to meet people where they work, live, and play with the Good News of salvation.

Pastoral Challenges

The researcher has often experienced a common problem in pastoral ministry: congregants are often unaware of the complexities and difficulties pastors face in their callings and daily ministries. Pastoral challenges are often unique to pastoral ministry. Shepherding regenerate believers alone is no easy task, especially when reviewing the roles, responsibilities, and expectations a pastor already faces in the ministry. When adding in the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate in their congregations, ministry and life become more complicated and tenuous.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations

Leith Anderson, the former Senior Pastor at Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, clearly and succinctly says this about pastoral ministry,

Pastoral ministry has never been easy. Paul told Timothy to “suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim, 2:3). Paul’s two letters to Timothy show why it was so difficult. Teachers of false doctrine were in the church (1 Tim. 1:3), and Timothy’s ministry related not only to godly Christians but also to people who were lawless, rebellious, ungodly, sinners, unholy, profane, murderers, kidnappers, and liars (1:9-10), just to name a few characteristics.⁸⁵

Timothy had difficult tasks before him as an undershepherd of Jesus Christ. Anderson points out that even though his ministry bore great results, especially in the church at Ephesus, he might not have pastored as well as he should have. In Revelation 2:5, Jesus graded Timothy’s church low for forsaking their first love.⁸⁶ There is always something

⁸⁵ Leith Anderson, “Personal Challenges for 21st-Century Pastors,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 151 (July-September 1994): 259.

⁸⁶ Anderson, 260.

more a pastor can do such as: a better sermon to preach, show more personal and emotional investment in relationships, love more and better, spend more time with the congregation, etc. The list seems almost endless. Anderson also points out that pastoring is challenging in the best of churches.⁸⁷ Now, insert into the picture a church damaged by conflict, driven by wolves, false teachers, and unrepentant goats.

In addition to these challenges, Anderson points out that while some aspects of pastoral ministry have been the same over the centuries; the 21st century introduces new complexities. Social relationships, blended families, and larger groups of people that are not as heterogenous as before have introduced more complexities in ministering to people of different races, languages, socioeconomic positions, and spiritual perspectives are all new aspects of pastoral ministry as the social climate of America changes. Anderson states,

“Pastors of the 21st-century churches will be increasingly challenged to understand complexity, cope with complexity, and minister in a context of complexity. This includes learning how to deal with people in groups because everyone cannot be related to as an individual. This includes coping with a confused level of familiarity since some church members will be close friends while others will be virtual strangers. This means preaching in a style that will communicate effectively to diverse audiences. And this means having skills in prioritizing.”⁸⁸

Pastoral expectations have also become more complex. While some expect the pastor to be a scholar, others expect him to be a counselor. Other expectations include friend, leader, administrator, evangelist, athlete, musician, artist, and helper on the farm during the harvest. And, of course, almost everyone expects the pastor to be a living

⁸⁷ Anderson, 260.

⁸⁸ Anderson, 261.

model of godliness.⁸⁹ A pastor will often fill multiple roles within a church such as being the preacher, counselor, coordinator, spiritual director, teacher, supervisor, chief executive, financial officer, and human resources coordinator.⁹⁰ Stanley Grenz elaborates on this as well:

At the same time the pastor's ministry is one of greater depth because of the "full-time" status involved ... Included are the general responsibilities of the eldership, including administrative oversight, congregational leadership, and "shepherding." These are augmented by such activities as leading worship, teaching, preaching, and evangelism. All pastoral activity occurs in the context of an ultimate objective, namely, preparing "God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12).⁹¹

Denominational and community expectations have also increased. Pastors must sometimes participate on denominational boards, in committees, or attend conferences. Some churches expect pastors to be their spokesperson in the community and at local events. Adding to the pressures of pastoral ministry, pastors are often expected to be lifelong learners through formal education or in constant adaptation to an ever-changing landscape within a local church. An increase in family issues and financial burdens has also plagued many pastors. Moral failures have also been on the rise. Anderson shares four typical steps toward moral failure by clergy: arrogance, addiction, aloneness, and adultery. In the past, churches calling a pastor were concerned about doctrinal beliefs. In the 21st century, there is an emphasis on godliness and marital fidelity. Churches are

⁸⁹ Anderson 262.

⁹⁰ Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact of Pastor's Spiritual Practices on Burnout," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 64 no. 2 (2010): 2.

⁹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 563.

increasingly looking for leaders who not only believe and teach the right things but also live out the truth of Jesus Christ.⁹²

In *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds*, Brian Croft expounds on a list of ten key priorities at the heart of a pastor's ministry.⁹³ These prove to be common challenges for pastors:

1. *Guard the truth.* A pastor must be committed to the word of God and the apostles' teachings and be willing to preach, teach, and defend them when they are contrary to culture.
2. *Preach the word.* A pastor must faithfully preach the whole counsel of God's Word, carefully explaining the meaning of the text and applying it to the lives of those under his care.
3. *Pray for the flock.* A pastor should be an intercessor, bringing the needs of His church before God and modeling prayer both publicly and privately.
4. *Set an example.* A pastor is an example to his flock and should always be aware that others are looking to him as a model. While a pastor should model righteous behavior, he must also model confession and repentance, acknowledging he is also a sinner and teaching his people how to apply the gospel to life.
5. *Visit the sick.* Pastors should visit those who are sick and in need of care and encouragement, and they must train others in the congregation to help care for those in need.
6. *Comfort the grieving.* In the face of death, a pastor should grieve with those who grieve and should sensitively remind those who are grieving of the hope and encouragement of the gospel. This involves preaching gospel-focused messages at funerals and graveside services.
7. *Care for widows.* This much-neglected biblical teaching calls for pastors to be responsible for the widows of the church and to find creative ways for widows by involving their families and other members of the church in caring for these special women.
8. *Confront sin.* Pastors need to confront sin and lead the church in the exercise of discipline in the hope of repentance and restoration.
9. *Encourage the weaker sheep.* Though we can be tempted to easily dismiss people who are slow to change, God calls pastors to model patience and

⁹² Anderson, 265.

⁹³ Brian Croft, *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 16-17.

persevering hope by working with those who are difficult, despairing, and challenging.

10. *Identify and train leaders.* It is the primary responsibility of pastors to identify, train, and affirm leaders in the church. Every pastor should have a plan for doing this in his local church and should be actively seeking out the next generation of leaders.

After reviewing this summary and overview, it is no wonder Leith Anderson makes the claim that “pastoral ministry has never been easy.”

In speaking about the topic of constant pastoral turnover in a local church, which is an indication of an unhealthy congregation, H.B. Charles shares,

When a church repeatedly refuses to let the pastor lead the church, it usually means that people who are not called to be pastors are actually leading the church from the pews. They may be called Deacon, Sister, or chairman, but they are acting pastor of the church, nonetheless—wannabe pastors without biblical qualification, divine sanction, or Christian integrity.⁹⁴

These situations can be demoralizing and frustrating for pastors who know *they* have been called by God to shepherd the flock. Yet, the unhealthiness of the church will not allow them to lead as the Bible requires and commands. A pastor might ask just who is leading the church. Is it some other individual or a group of specific people? What was the vetting process for this person or people? Do they meet the biblical qualifications of a pastor? It has been the researcher’s experience that in similar instances when people other than the called pastor are influencing and leading the church, it is an unspoken and unwritten system embedded in the congregation’s DNA. Who then will exercise church discipline? Who determines membership standards and qualifications? Who protects the

⁹⁴ H.B. Charles, *On Pastoring: A Short Guide to Living, Leading, and Ministering as a Pastor* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2016), 56-57.

flock from the wolves within? It is possible, at times, that the wolves and goats are the ones leading.

Burnout

“Recent data collected from Barna’s pastor poll indicate that U.S. pastors are currently in crisis and at risk of burnout. Notably, in 2021 alone, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of pastors who are thinking about quitting ministry entirely. With pastors’ well-being on the line, and many on the brink of burnout, 38 percent indicate they have considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year. This percentage is up nine full points (from 29%) since Barna asked church leaders this same question at the beginning of 2021.”⁹⁵ Three contributing factors to the increase in burnout are responsibility overload (which includes additional roles and responsibilities), blurred boundaries (setting limits and free time), and cultural shifts (fast-changing culture, pandemic, social media, and politics).⁹⁶

Research has shown that the average pastor works between fifty and sixty hours per week, spends little time in personal spiritual formation activity, and lacks a close personal friend or support-accountability network. While nurturing others spiritually, pastors often tend to neglect their personal spiritual growth, which can result in health problems such as heightened blood pressure, cholesterol levels, risk of heart disease⁹⁷,

⁹⁵ “38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year,” accessed August 27, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>.

⁹⁶ “Pastor Burnout: Causes, Symptoms & How Your Church Can Help,” accessed August 27, 2022, <https://www.subsplash.com/blog/pastor-burnout>.

⁹⁷ Chandler, 1.

depression, hypertension, diabetes, and irritable bowel syndrome.⁹⁸ Burnout is typically experienced as a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai explain,

Emotional exhaustion consists of “feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work.” An individual experiencing exhaustion may feel drained and experience a lack of energy, causing the individual to be unable to unwind or recover. Individuals may employ depersonalization, the second dimension of burnout, to distance themselves from disappointment and exhaustion. Depersonalization is characterized by “an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one’s services, care, treatment, or instruction.” In other words, depersonalization is a defensive response to or disengagement with the clients or patients who are making demands on the service provider who is experiencing burnout. The final component of burnout, lack of personal accomplishment, revolves around one’s “feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work with people.”⁹⁹

As a result of burnout, pastors experience additional stress, frustration, loneliness, isolation, and spiritual dryness. The factors contributing to burnout are varied. Below are six other common causes:¹⁰⁰

1. Pastors and ministry leaders consistently experience high demands on their time.
2. Role ambiguity and conflict contribute to confusion, with pastors filling multiple roles.
3. Ambiguous success criteria can plague pastors who may never know when they have been successful in their pastoral role.
4. Inadequate preparation may plague pastors who believe that their previous training was insufficient for the challenges they face.
5. A lack of an adequate support system contributes to isolation and loneliness, which prevents personal and spiritual restoration and renewal.
6. Since they constantly feed others spiritually, pastors often neglect their own spiritual development.

⁹⁸ Thomas V. Frederick, Scott Dunbar, and Yvonne Thai, “Burnout in Christian Perspective,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 67 no. 3 (June 2018): 268.

⁹⁹ Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai, 268.

¹⁰⁰ Chandler, 2.

Burnout is a challenge embedded in pastoral ministry. Often, a pastor may not be aware of the symptoms, or if they are, they are reluctant to share them with anyone within their congregation for fear of being seen as weak. A step to recovery and support is to inform the elders or other church leaders if or when the pastor recognizes burnout is approaching. This will open the door to solutions such as taking extra time off (short term), delegating specific tasks and responsibilities, or formulating a plan for a sabbatical (long term). In addition, pastoral burnout should not rest solely on the shoulders of the pastor. The congregation must become educated and aware of the symptoms to support their clergy and the health of the congregation. This includes making training and resources available for church members, staff, and lay leaders.¹⁰¹ Since a church is a community of faith, pastoral burnout must become a community issue that needs to be tended to by the membership in loving kindness, care, and compassion.

Another aspect of pastoral burnout relates to discouragement. Seasoned pastors Derek Prime and Alistair Begg note,

Discouragement is a most subtle peril. Involved so much with people and their spiritual progress, people may give us tremendous joy and great sorrow. The very people who have given the greatest joy may give the greatest sorrow. While Paul could write, “Now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 3:8), he knew the opposite emotion when believers wavered and went backward. God’s people have a unique capacity to sweeten or spoil our days, to thrill us or to cast us into the depths of depression. One moment we may feel that there is no other place to be but where we are, and the next we wish we could be anywhere else. People may listen carefully to what we say as we faithfully declare truths of the gospel, and then choose to turn away. “Have I now become your enemy,” Paul wrote to the Galatians (4:16), “by telling you the

¹⁰¹ Tracey Dawson, “Whose Problem is Clergy Burnout?,” *The Christian Century*, 137 no. 24 (November 18, 2020): 23.

truth?” We may feel acutely the absence of those who have decided not to come anymore because they have found the cost of discipleship too great.¹⁰²

An essential aspect of what these pastors state is that they were referring to the regenerate believers in local churches. Discouragement comes in many ways and various forms. It also comes from within. It comes from the people of God. In Numbers 11:1-15, Moses complains to God about the people of Israel and the burden of feeding and leading them. He cries out to God in verse 15, “If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.” The levels of discouragement from within the community of God’s people can be enormous.

In the New Testament church, pastors will experience burdens, troubles, and trials by those whom the Lord has saved and regenerated. What does this say about the unregenerate who attend worship services and participate in church-related events, those who might seek to have their input heard on matters of theology, worship, or church operations? The stressors pastors face from those *in* Christ most certainly can be amplified and compounded by those who are *not* in Christ. This is especially true if the unregenerate person or people are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Thus, if these compounded stressors are allowed to propagate and are not dealt with, the ramifications can add to and contribute to pastoral burnout.

Hartness M. Samushonga at the London School of Theology in London, United Kingdom, explored the concept of burnout through a theological lens centered around Moses’ experience. He discovered that much of the discourse on ministry-associated

¹⁰² Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 298.

stress and burnout presented is through the lens of psychology with little or no reference to Scripture.¹⁰³ As has already been explored, Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai present the three elements of burnout described as emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and lack of personal accomplishment (PA). Samushonga's work utilizes these elements in view of Moses' experience with the people of Israel. An exploration of each one will be examined in that context and through the lens of burnout pertaining to the difficulties of trying to shepherd the unregenerate.

Emotional Exhaustion – In regard to the symptoms of EE as feelings of being emotionally overextended and drained by one's contact with other people as defined by Leiter and Maslach, Moses' own utterances to Yahweh in Numbers 11:1-17 suggest that he was, or at least, on the verge of becoming emotionally strained by his experiences and contact with the congregation of Israel.¹⁰⁴

Moses stated in Numbers 11:14, "I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me." This verse speaks to his exhaustion as he led the people of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness. He dealt with complaints and discouragements from the people, the same people who witnessed God's mighty hand be with them through the Red Sea and various signs and wonders. These were indeed God's people whom He called. They knew God. They worshipped. They witnessed a portion of His might and holiness. Yet, they contributed to Moses' emotional exhaustion. In thinking about a New Testament church and pastoral ministry, pastors continue to experience the same issues and challenges with God's people. If pastors can arrive at a place of emotional exhaustion in shepherding the regenerate saints, the unregenerate will add to the elevated levels of

¹⁰³ Hartness M. Samushonga, "Distinguishing Between the Pastor and the Superhero: God on Burnout and Self-Care," *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 31 no. 1 (2021): 4.

¹⁰⁴ Samushonga, 11.

exhaustion. As pastors spend time trying to shepherd the unregenerate to the Lord through counseling, Bible study, teaching, or mentoring, frustration can set in quickly when there is no evidence of understanding, faith, salvation, and sanctification.

Depersonalization – Moses presented traits associated with the DP dimension of burnout as characterized by being cynical and having a negative attitude towards the people whom one is helping, irritability, loss of idealism and withdrawal. Moses expressed his revulsion of the congregation’s demand of meat (v 13B). Here Moses comes across as one who is no longer concerned about the people. He is seen as one displaying contempt for them and his unwanted role as their parent.¹⁰⁵

The depersonalization element Moses experienced towards the people of Israel illuminates his emotional exhaustion in trying to lead them to the land of promise. In the New Testament church, the pastor is called to shepherd the saints in preparation for eternal life in the new heaven and earth. When emotionally exhausted and burned out, a pastor will begin to depersonalize those within the congregation. It becomes a “defensive response to or disengagement”¹⁰⁶ from those in the church. The researcher has experienced that the unregenerate are often the first group of people where depersonalization and disengagement occur. While this might be deemed subjective, there is an element of objective truth in it as the process is a form of triage in which the burned out pastor has to carefully determine where they will spend precious and diminished time, energy, and resources.

Personal Accomplishment (lack of) – Moses’ expresses feelings of diminished competence or capacity to meet the challenging demand of his followers and not making progress in leading the people. He cries out to Yahweh stressing that the burden was “too heavy” for him (vs14). It is highly unlikely that he would feel a

¹⁰⁵ Samushonga, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai, 268.

strong sense of personal accomplishment in his role, as evidenced by his utterance that he would rather die than continue in the role (in its present form) (vs15).¹⁰⁷

Moses hit a low point in his ministry at this juncture in the narrative. He cried out to the Lord in despair and discontent. An assumption might be made that Moses felt like a failure. After experiencing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, the road of negativity had already been paved as Moses walked along in frustration. Hebrews 11:1 reads, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Yet, the people of Israel had seen. They saw the miracles. They saw the glory of the Lord in a pillar of smoke during the day and a pillar of fire at night. They witnessed the bright glowing face of Moses as he descended the mountain after spending time with the Lord. After all of this, Moses seems to have arrived at a place in his ministry where he might have asked himself what the point of it all is. A pastor who has experienced emotional exhaustion and depersonalization will similarly ask the same question. This can be especially true when trying to shepherd the unregenerate who exhibit no hunger for God’s Word, transformation, or evangelism.

It has been stated that pastoring is not easy. This is an objective truth about the ministry. Attempting to lovingly show someone in a congregation who believes they are regenerate but more than likely might not be is a difficult and complex task, especially in light of common and popular cultural perspectives on the doctrine of regeneration. Easy believism and cheap grace are attractive to many who like the idea of Jesus but do not truly intend to take up their cross, deny themselves to follow Him in surrender and obedience. Our post-Christian society has compounded the complexities and challenges

¹⁰⁷ Samushonga, 11.

pastors face already. Adding to the usual burdens and stress, these new challenges can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment, known as burnout.

Lastly, a stressor for pastors might be that there is not enough time spent evangelizing a person and too much time spent on discipleship when the person is not yet regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Frustration from a lack of understanding and growth can turn to bitterness and fatigue. A pastor can experience hopelessness as they spend countless hours leading an unregenerate person through a discipleship course that lasts for weeks. Weekly one-on-one meetings can become burdensome and tiring as the pastor wonders why there is no evidence of faith or change or when there is no hunger for the Word of God or evangelism. The pastor might ask how long this should continue. How much more time, energy, and resources should be spent ministering to this person trying to “get” them to see the truth? What about the rest of the congregation, such as the sheep of the flock? Is the pastor’s time spent primarily trying to disciple an unregenerate person in that the flock is being neglected? If the Gospel has the power to save (Rom. 1:16), which it certainly does, pastors must start with a proclamation of the Good News first and then allow the Holy Spirit to work in the unregenerate person’s life. Pastors should consider spending more time evangelizing the unregenerate first within their congregations. Phillips shares, “Ultimately, the creation of Christlikeness in a person is a miracle of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:18-25; Rom 8:11). Yet the Spirit uses various tools to

accomplish His purpose. These tools include (but are not limited to) the ministry of the Word (Eph 5:26) and the corporate worship of the church (Col 3:16).”¹⁰⁸

Thus far in this project, the researcher has explored and examined what Scripture and literature have to say about the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate within their congregations. More specifically, in chapter two research was conducted to define the unregenerate. Secondly, the Pastoral Epistles were researched to explain pastoral responsibilities within a local church context and setting. Lastly, in chapter three, literature was researched to explore cultural perspectives defining the unregenerate, pastoral challenges, and responsibilities pertaining to evangelizing the unregenerate. In the next chapter, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study regarding how pastors shepherd the unregenerate in their specific ministry contexts within the Forest Lakes District of the EFCA.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, 173.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to address the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate in their congregations. Interviews and questionnaires were implemented as the research instruments. The participants included pastors and elders from churches within the Forest Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America. Data was collected from these interviews and questionnaires to understand better how pastors define and determine who the unregenerate are in their congregations, the methods they use to shepherd them, and to explore the difficulties they face regarding this topic in their local ministry context.

Research Methods

Qualitative Research

This project was designed using qualitative research methods. Creswell defines this type of research:

Qualitative research begins with the assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ John W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 42-43.

This project identified a problem that needed to be explored and researched within the context of pastoral ministry. The researcher conducted interviews and questionnaires with pastors and elders to hear their voices regarding the problem through their experiences and practices as subject matter experts in the field. Data was collected and analyzed from these interviews and questionnaires in search of patterns, themes, and other relevant information.

Case Study

The case study model was used as the primary method of research in which the researcher sought to explore the problem in great depth by focusing on similar cases in their ministry settings.¹¹⁰ Creswell states, “A single case can be selected or multiple cases identified so that they can be compared. Typically, case study researchers study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information not lost in time.”¹¹¹ The researcher engaged in multiple cases from several churches to seek accurate data from pastors and elders currently serving in local churches in the Forest Lake District. A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is its in-depth understanding of the case. Relying on one source of data is typically not enough to develop this in-depth understanding.¹¹² Through the case study approach, the researcher gathered data from multiple sources via interviews and questionnaires.

¹¹⁰ Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2018), 286.

¹¹¹ Creswell, 97.

¹¹² Creswell, 98.

Research Instruments

Interviews

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The social interactions between the researcher and the interviewees were valuable experiences.

Creswell shares more on this method,

An interview is considered to be a social interaction based on a conversation ... an interview is where “knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” ... The qualitative researcher interview is further described as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of the experience, to uncover their lived world” ... Who is interviewed and what questions are asked depends on the purpose for the study and research questions guiding the study. Interview questions are often the subquestions in the research study, phrased in a way that interviewees can understand.¹¹³

Before the interviews were conducted, each participant was emailed the questions from the interview guide in advance. This was done so that each person would have ample time to pray over, reflect on, and consider their answers. Eight questions were provided. They were open-ended to allow for as much time as was needed for each participant to share. The interview guides addressed two themes related to the ministry to the unregenerate. Four questions focused on an understanding of Matthew 7 and four questions focused on ministry challenges. The questions were designed based on and informed by the research conducted in chapters two and three to help the researcher gain more information regarding the problem being researched.¹¹⁴ The questions from the interview guide are provided in Appendix A.

¹¹³ Creswell, 163-164.

¹¹⁴ William Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2000), 57.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used for the elders to help the researcher gain more information regarding the problem being researched. Questionnaires are valuable in that they allow for participation by those who live far away or do not have the time to meet in face-to-face interviews.¹¹⁵ Since the polity of many churches in the Forest Lakes District of the EFCA use a plurality of elders model, where the pastors are also considered elders, the same eight open-ended questions used for the interviews were asked. The questionnaires were uploaded to an online format using Qualtrics. Since many elders in the district are volunteers and not vocational pastors, consideration was taken concerning time constraints, family, and work situations. See Appendix B for the Online Questionnaire for Elders.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews

The interviews were primarily conducted face-to-face at the pastor's church. Online video chat sessions were used to capture a similar social and professional environment when this was not feasible. The questions from the interview guide (Appendix A) were provided via email before the interviews. This was done to allow time for the pastors to pray about and consider their responses before the interviews were conducted. In addition, an informed consent form (Appendix C) was sent via email, requiring a response for participation. At the beginning of the interviews, questions were asked about each pastor's demographics (Appendix D).

¹¹⁵ Leedy, 154.

The interviews were about an hour long on average. The researcher utilized the interview guide to keep the flow structured and moving forward to be respectful of the interviewee's time. The responses to each question were recorded on paper by the researcher in the form of interview notes. In addition, when permitted by the interviewee, an audio recording was utilized during each session to assist the researcher in collecting the data later to be added to the interview notes. After completing all the interviews, the researcher collected all the data from the interview notes to compare the pastors' answers. The data was transferred onto a spreadsheet for analysis to search for themes, patterns, and pertinent information.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires (Appendix B) were distributed to the elders from the same churches where the pastors were interviewed using an online format on Qaultrics. A link to the questionnaire was sent via email to each participant. Each online questionnaire required consent and agreement to participate before proceeding. The informed consent form for the questionnaires can be reviewed in Appendix E. Participants were informed that their responses would be confidential. At the end of the questionnaire, the elders were asked questions about their demographics (Appendix F). After all of the questionnaires were completed, the researcher utilized Qaultrics' data and analysis tools to collect, organize, compare, and analyze the data for themes, patterns, and pertinent information.

Participants Demographics

Pastors

Seven pastors were contacted for the interviews, of which five replied, stating their willingness to participate. Because of confidential reasons due to the sensitivity and

nature of the questions and answers, the names of the churches and pastors will not be provided. Instead, each will be referenced by a corresponding letter.

Pastor A at Church A is 62 years old. He has been the pastor of his current church for 14 years. In total, he has been a pastor for 23 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 50 people.

Pastor B at Church B is 36 years old. He has been the pastor of his current church for 13 years. In total, he has been a pastor for 13 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 80 people.

Pastor C at Church C is 59 years old. He has been the pastor of his current church for 2.5 years. In total, he has been a pastor for 30 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 100 people.

Pastor D at Church D is 40 years old. He has been the pastor of his current church for 10 years. In total, he has been a pastor for 22 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 750 people.

Pastor E at Church E is 73 years old. He has been the pastor of his current church for 15 years. In total, he has been a pastor for 42 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 203 people.

Elders

During the final section of the interviewing process with the pastors, the researcher asked them to share the link to the online elder questionnaire with their church elders. Not every elder responded to the questionnaire from these churches. In response, the researcher asked elders from other churches within the Forest Lakes District. Because of confidential reasons due to the sensitivity and nature of the questions and answers, the

names of the churches and elders will not be provided. Instead, each will be referenced by a corresponding letter.

Elder A at Church F is in the 35-44 age range. He has been an elder of his current church for 3 years. In total, he has been an elder for 3 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 120 people.

Elder B at Church B is in the 55-64 age range. He has been an elder of his current church for 12 years. In total, he has been an elder for 15 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 80 people.

Elder C at Church B is in the 55-64 age range. He has been an elder of his current church for 2 years. In total, he has been an elder for 22 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 80 people.

Elder D at Church F is in the 35-44 age range. He has been an elder of his current church for 4 years. In total, he has been an elder for 4 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 120 people.

Elder E at Church G is in the 55-64 age range. He has been an elder of his current church for 3 years. In total, he has been an elder for 28 years. The average Sunday morning worship service attendance is 150 people.

In conclusion, the goal of interviewing at least five pastors and seeking to have five elders complete the online questionnaire from different sizes of churches was met. All of the questions were answered by all participants. The results and findings of the interviews and questionnaires will be presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data generated by this project is presented and analyzed in this chapter. It is divided into two categories. The first category pertains to the data recorded and analyzed from the pastor interviews. The second category pertains to the data recorded and analyzed from the questionnaire the elders completed. The final section of this chapter presents the overall analysis and findings regarding themes, patterns, and other pertinent information.

Pastors

The researcher recorded the following responses during the interviews with the pastors. The researcher sought to be as objective as possible in sharing the results of each question asked below.

Question One: Biblically, how do you define who is unregenerate and regenerate?

The researcher sought to determine how pastors define those who are unregenerate and regenerate. Biblical and theological responses were sought when asking this question during each interview. The researcher was also trying to determine if each pastor could distinguish between the two concepts. The following responses were provided:

Pastor A at Church A made a distinction between those who are unregenerate and those who are regenerate. He stated that the difference is black and white. A regenerate person is born again in accordance with John 3. In addition, being born again is an act of God in a person's life (Eph. 2:4-9). Pastor A cited Romans 10 to illustrate the believer's

response to God's gift of faith and salvation. As a part of being born again and regenerated by God, godly fruit will be evident in the believer's life.

Pastor B at Church B defined the unregenerate as those who might attend worship services but have not been born again as new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). They do not have testimonies or ones that are clear and biblical. He acknowledged that unregenerate people attend church services and activities and that it is good for them to participate, hoping they hear the Gospel and respond to it. He defined the regenerate as those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, have been born again into a new life, have a personal relationship with Jesus, and have repented of their sins. He stated that one should be able to tell if someone is regenerate by their lives, fruit, and witness.

Pastor C at Church C defined the unregenerate as those who have not been born again. They will exhibit no evidence of spiritual life in the Lord, and there is no evidence of transformational change in their lives. He defined the regenerate as those who have been born again by an act of God in their lives who imparts new spiritual life.

Pastor D at Church D answered the question with a few questions of his own. When first speaking to someone in his congregation, he initially asks, "Have you surrendered your life to Christ over what you want?" or "If you die right now, why do you think you would be in heaven?" This pastor understood the concept of being "born again" but stated that he does not use the term. He distinguishes between those who are merely religious by works and attend church services and "who come and think they are good" because they are doing what they think must be done to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. He seeks evidence if the person has surrendered to the lordship of Jesus and his authority.

Pastor E at Church E defined the unregenerate as those who have not yet placed their faith in Jesus Christ. He also defined this group of people who attend church services as seekers. The regenerate were defined as those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, have an understanding that Christ's work on the cross was full payment for their sins, and that there is nothing anyone can add to that. Their lives show that they have started following Christ, which is evident in new sensitivities and an attitude of gratefulness to God for what He has done, reading and studying the Bible, and a desire to follow Him.

Question Two: How do you determine if someone is unregenerate or regenerate in your congregation? Does Matthew 7 play in your assessment, if so, how?

The researcher was trying to learn how each pastor determines who might be unregenerate or regenerate in their specific ministry contexts and what strategies they employ. Since the questions were provided before the interviews, each pastor had time to read through Matthew 7 to determine if the text plays a part in their assessments and understanding.

Pastor A at Church A stated that a judgment or assessment must be made to determine if someone is regenerate by looking for good fruit in their lives (you will know them by their fruit, Mt. 7), a personal relationship with Jesus, and what their behavior displays. A regenerate person can share a salvation testimony and make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Evidence of the following should also be seen in the person: transformation, the Gospel being applied to their lives, repentance, overcoming addictions, and other sins. Pastor A was reminded of the Parable of the Weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 in that the weeds were permitted to live alongside the wheat until the time came to reap the harvest.

Pastor B at Church B shared that a pastor must discern, without condemning (Mt. 7), by making an assessment to determine who is regenerate in his congregation. The following are examples to look for: a credible profession of faith, a testimony of faith, an understanding of the Gospel, genuine change in their heart and life, good fruit (Mt. 7), a life that shows faith in Jesus Christ, and when they want to be baptized of their own volition. He stated that not everyone who attends his church is saved and that according to Matthew 7:13-14 only a few will be in heaven for eternity. Pastor B has experienced some in his church use the phrase “don’t judge me” relating to being in Christ. He fears that some will hear the words of Jesus say to them, “depart from me” (Mt. 7:23).

Pastor C at Church C pointed out that he practices discernment by assessing people in his congregation. He does this through observations and conversations to look for evidence of being born again, if there is a connection of good fruit attached to a proclamation of faith, or if it is works based. He stated that if a person is regenerate, there will always be fruit. He emphatically stated that it is impossible for there not to be any good fruit if someone is truly saved. Pastor C also discerns if there is obedience to Jesus and His commands. He also stated that discerning and assessing are essential during spiritual counseling, which determines how he will shepherd the individual based on the evidence or lack thereof of salvation.

Pastor D at Church D responded that a pastor must make judgments internally (in the church) to determine where people are in their faith journey (whether they are saved or not). He pointed to Matthew 7:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 5 as commands to judge believers for their sake and the church’s health. He determines, through observation, if someone is regenerate, if the person is living obedient lives to Christ in doing the will of God as

Scripture declares, and if good fruit is visible because of their conversion. Obedience to the lordship of Jesus will be evident in the life of a true believer. He does not lead in the sinner's prayer regarding the unregenerate in his congregation. Instead, he evaluates if there is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in the person's life. Pastor D is concerned about false conversions. He feels that many think they are saved, but in reality, based on Scripture, they are not.

Pastor E at Church E shared that in view of Matthew 7, a pastoral assessment must be done to discern if good fruit is present in the person's life. In addition, there must be some display of the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5), as being religious is not enough. Those who are spiritual (have the indwelling Holy Spirit) will be able to discern the spiritual things of the Lord (1 Cor. 2). This will be evident in the life and faith of a born again believer.

Question Three: Using percentages, describe how many in your congregation are unregenerate? How do the following passages influence your answer? (Matthew 7:13-14, 9:37-38, and 22:14)

The researcher sought to understand if the pastors could distinguish between the unregenerate and the regenerate within their congregation in relation to the theme found in Matthew's Gospel of the "many and the few." Based on the passages provided, the researcher asked this question to encourage the pastor to think about the percentage of those in their congregations who might be unregenerate.

Pastor A at Church A believes that at least 25% are unregenerate. However, he thinks that number might be higher.

Pastor B at Church B thought through this aloud with the interviewer. After reading the passages, he hoped that inside a local congregation, the percentage of the unregenerate would be lower than somewhere out in the world. He gave an example of

going to a shopping mall where he believes the percentage of unregenerate people there would be extremely high. In his church, he leaned towards 20% being unregenerate.

Pastor C at Church C believes that about 30% of the people in his congregation are unregenerate.

Pastor D at Church D believes up to 35% of the people in his congregation are unregenerate.

Pastor E at Church E believes that 5-10% of his congregation are unregenerate.

Question Four: How do you shepherd those you have identified as unregenerate in your congregation?

The researcher sought to understand how pastors might shepherd differently if they determined someone is unregenerate in their congregations. The question was designed to ask how they shepherd in those instances and what the differences might be.

Pastor A at Church A asked the question, “Can you disciple someone who is not a believer?” He responded that he tries to shepherd the unregenerate by teaching them what Jesus taught. He referred to the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the many teachings in Matthew’s Gospel, including the Sermon on the Mount. He stated that he discipled someone who might not be regenerate because he does not know or is unsure if the person is truly saved.

Pastor B at Church B ensures that he continues to preach the Word of God in hopes that their eyes will be open to the truth of the Bible to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. He also shepherds the unregenerate by loving them. He understands that they might feel like they need to belong to the church before they believe. At his church, they instituted a policy that a person cannot become a member until they have been a part of the congregation for at least a year.

Pastor C at Church C shared how pastoral counseling is different for him depending on if he is with an unregenerate or regenerate person. How he guides those settings depends on the person(s) spiritual journey. Overall, he tries to shepherd the unregenerate by always bringing conversations and teachings back to the Gospel. He will use less “Christianese” (church language) to help remove obstacles or barriers. In addition, because he has a concern for their souls, he explains things during worship services and in the church bulletin. He does not want to assume people know the terms and phrases. He wants the unregenerate to feel welcomed in his church.

Pastor D at Church D uses conversations to ask newcomers in the church or those who have not professed faith in Christ spiritual questions. In those conversations, he tries to help an unregenerate person see that they need Jesus to forgive their sins. He stated that he feels pastors spend too much time trying to reaffirm false conversions. He was reminded of the Parable of the Weeds and the different soils, in which only one leads to salvation. He also emphasized that the Word of God must be preached. He acknowledges that not everyone in his congregation is saved. In some cases, people have been attending for quite some time and show no evidence of salvation or fruit.

Pastor E at Church E answered that he wants to ensure that he treats the unregenerate in his congregation with dignity. He wants them to know that they have value, are important to the church and God, and should not be looked down upon. He attempts to have a conversation and meet with every newcomer. He also writes a handwritten letter to each person.

Question Five: What strategies do you employ when shepherding the unregenerate?

This question was designed to ask what strategies the pastor uses to shepherd those identified as unregenerate. While question four was about personal pastoral methods, question five focused more on churchwide programs and plans.

Pastor A at Church A did not offer any intentional strategies. However, he said that serving the elements during communion once a month causes both the unregenerate and the regenerate to recognize their need for a Savior based on what the bread and the wine represent. In addition, He ensures that he preaches the Gospel, which is for everyone. Lastly, this pastor stated that he tends to spend less time with someone who shows no desire or hunger for the Lord. Instead, he invests more time in those who demonstrate a desire to grow in the faith.

Pastor B at Church B does not have any strategies built into his or the church's ministry in shepherding the unregenerate. There is a focus on evangelism with this group, but it is not part of a program or strategic plan. This pastor wanted the researcher to know that the Gospel is preached and presented mostly through sermons.

Pastor C at Church C offers a class specifically targeting those who might be unregenerate. The class focuses on discovering faith, which explains Christian terms, the Gospel, a relationship with Jesus Christ, and what it means to be born again. He also provides opportunities for those not in the faith to participate in church events in the community to expose them to what Christianity looks like in the life of the church.

Pastor D at Church D stated that there are no strategies or programming related to this topic at his church. However, conversations have begun to develop something in the future.

Pastor E at Church E has a guest assimilation program in place, especially for those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ. They are also encouraged to attend the church's small group program to connect with the regenerate believers. In addition, special events are held to invite those not in the faith. These events include a supper group, men's events, music, and times of singing hymns. This pastor was clear that he does not expect those who are unregenerate to act like those who are.

Question Six: Please share a few difficult and challenging experiences you have faced when shepherding the unregenerate in your congregation.

This question was designed to cause the pastor to think about some difficulties they have faced with shepherding someone they identified as unregenerate. The researcher sought to understand the dynamics of the difficult circumstances and experiences.

Pastor A at Church A experienced some difficulties with a small number of people at his church after the January 6, 2021, event at the United States Capitol building. After making a few comments on this event, this group of people opposed him as the pastor. He stated that they could not separate their political views from their faith. He referred to them as Christian nationalists who continue to bring conflict to the church. He also expressed difficulties trying to shepherd some people in the church who profess to be believers but have never shown any good fruit in their lives. Lastly, he shared about a gentleman in the church who professed not to be a believer. This pastor has invested much time in the man's life, hoping and praying he would come to know Jesus as his Savior. However, this has not yet happened, bringing frustration to the pastor.

Pastor B at Church B shared a time in 2014-2015 when the church and the pastor experienced difficult challenges. The congregational meetings were carnal, and a

charismatic woman claimed to have prophetic visions, which brought tension during that time of transition for the church. During and after that time, the pastor stated that the Lord removed many unregenerate people from the church to pave the way toward a healthier congregation which would come in the following years.

Pastor C at Church C shared several instances when he faced difficult challenges. On multiple occasions, he met couples who did not profess Christ as Lord but wanted to be married in the church. After providing a biblical definition of marriage, his requirement for pre-marital counseling, and referencing Scripture, many couples were still not interested in the Lord. This caused conflict and tension between the pastor and the couples. Another instance pertained to a man who sought membership in the church. However, he was cohabitating with a woman who was not his spouse and spending much time drinking in bars.

Pastor D at Church D shared a time when he had to have a hard discussion with someone who thought they were saved and that there was no biblical evidence in their lives to support their claim. The person angrily walked away, and the pastor never saw them again. He stated that he had had several conversations in which he hoped to help the unregenerate person see for themselves that they are not saved. The pastor shared that those conversations go very well about 75% of the time.

Pastor E at Church E responded to this question by sharing that most of his difficulties come from what he called “carnal believers” who could not adapt to changes in the church as they sought to reach the culture. These people did not like change. They only wanted to hang to what they knew and the traditions they grew up in. Other difficulties were faced by those who came to the church but were there only briefly.

Question Seven: Describe how you have experienced “wolves in sheep’s clothing” in your congregation.

The researcher sought to understand any experiences the pastors faced with dealing with what Jesus referred to as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” in Matthew 7:15-20.

Pastor A at Church A referred back to the small group of people regarding the January 6, 2021 incident from question six as potential wolves in sheep’s clothing. He provided more information about this group. They had an emotional connection to his church. However, he stated they were vicious and unkind people who caused division and promoted false teachings. Problems could have been minimized if the other church leaders had stood their ground. The current elders of the church during that time only wanted to keep the peace. They did not want to enact church discipline when it was desperately needed. The elders had personal connections with the group, such as having dinner and going hunting together. This aspect did not help the situation and division.

Pastor B at Church B shared his experiences as one who grew up in the church he is currently serving as the pastor. In referring to question six, he spoke about those who tried to take over the church. They were eventually asked to leave. In other instances, he identified issues where unregenerate people were serving in positions where salvation was necessary.

Pastor C at Church C shared a time about a man who started attending the church. The man studied theology and was asked to teach. However, after a short time, it was noticed that the man was beginning to gain a following, and danger signs were sounding alarms. The man was teaching doctrine that was not aligned with the church’s beliefs and statement of faith. Many of his teachings were about how to lead a church, which undermined the pastor and his authority. Eventually, the man was asked to leave.

Pastor D at Church D explained how he has dealt with wolves in sheep's clothing in his church, who often show themselves in the church's small groups. They seem more comfortable operating in smaller groups versus larger settings where more pastors and elders are present. Since his church has a larger attendance than many others in the district, he wanted to ensure the researcher understood the difference between larger and smaller churches regarding this topic. The larger the group, the harder it is to spot wolves. His strategy is to stay connected with the small group leaders to provide guidance when dealing with this issue.

Pastor E at Church E could not remember dealing with anyone in his congregation who could be identified as a wolf in sheep's clothing. He stated that the believers in his church are more likely to cause division.

Question Eight: What effects, have you experienced or witnessed, can dealing with the unregenerate in a congregation have on a pastor?

The researcher sought to understand what effects the pastors have experienced or witnessed other pastors face when trying to shepherd those in their congregations who have been identified as unregenerate. This included physical, mental, and spiritual aspects.

Pastor A at Church A shared several effects he experienced, such as loss of sleep and having to deal with fretting over conflict and tension in the church. Some within the church expressed concerns that he was facing burnout. He has since been focusing on his health and stress management. In addition, he is seeking to gain biblical wisdom while not being cynical. He does feel stronger now than before. Since focusing on his recovery and health, he feels the experience has made him a better pastor and leader.

Pastor B at Church B has struggled with the amount of energy needed in this topic in addition to the other duties and responsibilities of pastoral ministry. He and his family are facing health issues, which exacerbate the difficulties he faces as a pastor. Some of the most challenging areas he faces when trying to shepherd the unregenerate revolve around the ugliness of people walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. Lastly, the fire many pastors face will always be there. However, it is the interpersonal issues that cut the deepest for him.

Pastor C at Church C has experienced times of feeling drained by conflict in the church. He has learned to slow down to catch his breath, manage stress, and fight against bitterness. In addition, he has become aware that he needs to control the energy and time he invests in others based on their willingness and desires. He sees that cutting people off completely is sometimes necessary to prevent burnout.

Pastor D at Church D feels the effects of dealing with the unregenerate through fear. His fear is based on whether or not he did the right thing in the eyes of the Lord. He fears that he might have been the reason someone left his church, someone who might have been a regenerate believer. He struggles with tension, guilt, and shame in those situations. He worries that he might be too critical about the speck in another's eye while neglecting the plank in his own. Lastly, he feels deeply stressed when dealing with wolves in his congregation and the lack of support he receives from the other pastors on staff. He believes this stress can lead to burnout.

Pastor E at Church E shared that he has not experienced any effects dealing with the unregenerate in his congregation. Instead, he has been challenged by dealing with

those who profess faith in Christ. He has dealt with those who have been draining to him as he has tried to shepherd high-maintenance believers.

Elders

Since the elders completed an online questionnaire via Qualtrics using the same questions for the pastor interviews, their responses, as they wrote them in their own words and grammar, will be presented below under each question.

Question One: Biblically, how do you define who is unregenerate and regenerate?

Elder A at Church F – “John 3. You must be born of the spirit, if you are not born again, you are dead in your sins.”

Elder B at Church B – “Those who trust Jesus as their only hope and savior, thus having Jesus and the Holy Spirit indwelling and at the least, starting the sanctification process is someone who is regenerate. (Maybe some questions coming up address this) ... However, it can be difficult to ascertain without close knowledge of the person at times the status. Ultimately, God knows the heart, we can attempt to discern the heart but often don't fully know.”

Elder C at Church B – “I Believe if a person fulfills Romans 10:9 then they are saved. If we confess with mouth and believe in heart that God raised Christ from the dead.”

Elder D at Church F – “Unregenerate = Those who say that they have fellowship with God, but walk in darkness, lie, and do not practice the truth (1 John 1:6). If we have not been changed by Christ, then we are unregenerate. Regenerate = Those who have fellowship with God, have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and confess their sins. The regenerate have been changed by Christ and live for Christ, not just saying it, but doing it.”

Elder E at Church G – “Unregenerate are those who lack the Spirit of God and His baptism into the body of Jesus Christ (1 Cor.12:13). This baptism of the Spirit is accessed by repenting of one's sin and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”

Question Two: How do you determine if someone is unregenerate or regenerate in your congregation? Does Matthew 7 play in your assessment, if so, how?

Elder A at Church F – “The Bible speaks of ‘fruit’ you will know them by their fruit, someone who is actively pursuing God will show certain corrections, they will have a hunger for the Word, they will pray, there will be a desire for righteousness. There will be a day when people’s ‘good’ works will be cast aside and they will stand before a God who knows the heart, at that time they will be naked and they will be laid bare. The Bible says ‘many’ will say on that day. The Gospel of Christ is to be preached always, we don’t ultimately know who is really saved looking at the outside, Christ will judge.”

Elder B at Church B – “Certainly it does, it is part of scripture, though a human can never truly know the heart, an elder at times must attempt to see beyond the planks in our eyes to guide. James 2:14ff is also part of scripture. Applying each, Matthew 7 and James 2 etc., is something that we must lean on the Holy Spirit to understand. Also we must recognize that like in James 2 (earlier) we shouldn't be showing favoritism either for... any reason.”

Elder C at Church B – “Yes, Matthew 7 along with James ch 3,4 and 1 John 4. I think that the best way to determine if a person is regenerate or unregenerate in the congregation is to watch them for a significant portion of time, and see how they react to various situations. Over time, taking in events in context in the whole, is the best way I've found in helping to determine if a person is regenerate. In short, I never assume anyone is regenerate at first, I've made that mistake in the past and really think 1 Tim 5:22 ‘lay

hands on no man suddenly' is a warning against assuming people that have a 'good resume' are regenerate.”

Elder D at Church F – “Look at the fruit of the individuals in your congregation. If they have good fruit, it will be easy to see as you cannot hide good fruit. They are the ones that are humble yet serve the Lord with all that they do. They take scripture seriously and are continuously being changed by scripture. The regenerate will love God and keep his commandments (1 John 5:2-3). Matthew 7 tells us that false prophets will bear bad fruit. But only a diseased tree can bear bad fruit. We also see a few verses later that these false prophets may not even realize that they are not in Christ as many will say 'Lord, Lord', but won't enter the kingdom of heaven. Then Jesus compares the foundation in our faith to the foundation of a house. The foolish man (who is unregenerate) builds his house on sand, because he listens, but does not do. The wise man builds his house on a rock, because he listens and obeys. Between verses 15-27 we see how to identify the unregenerate (by their fruit), how the Lord doesn't know the unregenerate, and how the unregenerate may listen, but does not obey the words of Jesus.”

Elder F at Church G – “My informal assessment of regeneration is to examine the fruit of a person's life. If they seem to have no interest in pursuing Jesus Christ and obeying Him the presumption is that this person is either unregenerate or a carnal believer.”

Question Four: Using percentages, describe how many in your congregation are unregenerate? How do the following passages influence your answer? (Matthew 7:13-14, 9:37-38, and 22:14)

Elder A at Church F – “60% unregenerate, we see ‘few’ in these verses, the plain reading of these verses states that not many will enter the Kingdom of God. I do hold that until the last breath leaves a person’s body God can do that mighty work of salvation.”

Elder B at Church B – “Wow. I'd say maybe 2 or 3% of the membership have slipped in as non-Christians. I'm hoping the rest of the attenders (non members) are a least 50/50. If one is a member, they've claimed to be part of the body, there is quite a difference in that status than in someone who is an attender only. Attenders only - are not on the same page (we assume), Leadership also has a much higher standard than the regular membership.”

Elder C at Church B – “Those passages help. The previous passages I mentioned I lean on more. I watch how they handle situations, listen to what they say particularly about salvation, and look for fruits of the spirit Galatians 5:22. This is probably the single most difficult question to answer, and as an Elder, I'm always keeping in mind that a person in the congregation isn't necessarily saved. I'd say 65%. percentage is hard because it implies preciseness, it doesn't include error in your number. A more accurate way for me to assess your question would be ‘2/3.’ That is a far less precise yet more accurate number. More than half, not quite 3/4.”

Elder D at Church F – “My estimate is that 60-80% of my congregation are unregenerate. I believe this is in-line with these biblical passages as only a few demonstrate the change that only Christ can bring. Many may proclaim Christ with their words, but do not proclaim him with their actions.”

Elder E at Church G – “My assumption is that approximately 30 % of my congregants are unbelievers. I am influenced by the Matthew 7:13-14 passage. In our congregation there are two recovery ministries that bring several people to church from their respective ministries. Some in these ministries are confessed ‘seekers.’”

Question Four: How do you shepherd those you have identified as unregenerate in your congregation?

Elder A at Church F – “Preach the gospel to them, help them to examine themselves, we don’t know if their names are written in the book of life. The Call to make disciples is not optional, God is the author and finisher of our faith, we sow the seed, he makes it grow.”

Elder B at Church B – “The attempt for those non-members who attend to look for ways to be involved relationally, maybe regular coffee, encourage involvement in small groups, etc. Those who are members, I think the percentage of non-Christians is small in the membership, but... very similar in many ways, encourage involvement.”

Elder C at Church B – “Delicately. First, I have to remember it's the Lord who saves, not me. I just have to be the instrument. I'm careful when talking with the people so as to not give them excuses if I detect they may be under conviction by the Holy Spirit. Mostly, I wait until situations develop that I can either show God's love for them or talk about God's love for them.”

Elder D at Church F – “To be honest, I don't know. The best answer might be to love them, but to show them how they are not bearing the good fruit that those who are in Christ have.”

Elder F at Church G – “The starting point for ministry to unregenerate is to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ and serve their needs with gladness. This seems to get me a seat at the table to have deeper conversations about their faith, or lack thereof.”

Question Five: What strategies do you employ when shepherding the unregenerate?

Elder A at Church F – “Ask them to read their Bibles, the book of John is where I point them to. Meet with them, give them the gospel.”

Elder B at Church B – “I think I answered this, but attempt to build relationships to gain the ability to give advice ... way easier said than done.”

Elder C at Church B – “1) use opportunities to show or tell about God's love for them. For example, when they have a need in their life, if God gives me the ability to help them, help them. 2) be careful when talking church stuff to them. They may be coming to the church and think they are going to heaven because of that, but I'm careful of using inclusionary language in those cases. 3) Try to include them in as many church activities as I can/church work/etc.”

Elder D at Church F – “1. Continuously pray that their eyes will be open to recognize that they are unregenerate. 2. Ask them if they have a testimony, if they do, show them how their testimony isn't a conversion. 3. Share scripture with them on what it means to be in Christ. Challenge them to read scripture daily. 4. Share with them what Christ did for them, so they can have a relationship with God. 5. Love them enough to tell them the truth.”

Elder E at Church G – “Strategies mostly include serving and loving them as a gateway to presenting them the gospel.”

Question Six: Please share a few difficult and challenging experiences you have faced when shepherding the unregenerate in your congregation.

Elder A at Church F – “Dealing with unregenerate people in the church is difficult, they look at church as a social gathering. I see a lack of unity in many things, it's not ‘Thy’ will but ‘my’ will. Dealing with anger animosity and unforgiveness is hard.”

Elder B at Church B – “I've not many success stories to be honest, the jury is still out. I have one currently I meet with for coffee, I can't tell if he'd even consider himself

Christian or not, but I'm trying to understand why he feels 'job satisfaction' is more important than providing for and leading his wife and child. I don't know how much this helps and I don't see a line between unregenerate and regenerate in most cases, the status of the heart isn't something I can discern.”

Elder C at Church B – “At this church, dealing with family members of regenerate congregates that are unregenerate. They 'think' they are saved but aren't. We still have them come to church of course, but in one case when becoming a member was involved, based on their testimony, we felt it was better to allow them to become a member because there wasn't enough evidence that they weren't regenerate. We prayed and gave the Holy Spirit room to work and didn't push baptism on them. Later, no prompting, they wanted to be baptized. That I believe is another indicator of regeneration. A Previous church: A couple came to church being relatives of an elder. They were on fire for the Lord and within six months we had him on the elder board as well. 'Lay hands suddenly on no man' and we did. About a year after that things fell apart, they left the church and later got divorced. He is not back in church as far as I know. I think that we accepted them into the fold way too fast. Were they regenerate or unregenerate? I don't know based on how things turned out. That is why I say give people time, they will show you eventually.”

Elder D at Church F – “The unregenerate are more concerned about personal agendas instead of following the words of Christ. The personal agendas often times stir up other unregenerate people in the congregation. It can be difficult for the church leadership to stay focused on the work of the church as they can get sidetracked with dealing with these personal agendas. Often times the worldview of the unregenerate is

reflected in these personal agendas. Another challenging experience is showing an unregenerate person how they are behaving is not how Christ would want them to behave. Most unregenerate people I know do not read scripture regularly. Scripture doesn't have the importance to the unregenerate as they do not recognize it as the word of God. Through scripture the regenerate sees what behavior pleases God, but the unregenerate does not see this and constantly needs to be informed how God wants his people to behave.”

Elder E at Church G – “The challenges include resistance to moral instruction. That is no surprise since the Spirit of God is not compelling them toward change. It also includes avoidance. Those who attend but are intent on not giving up their lifestyle to Jesus often avoid deeper conversations.”

Question Seven: Describe how you have experienced “wolves in sheep’s clothing” in your congregation.

Elder A at Church F – “Troublemakers, stirring up strife. Trying to lead sheep astray.”

Elder B at Church B – “Funny, thankfully most of them have disappeared. A couple of times we've had those in leadership who shouldn't have been there, for a variety of reasons. We've had a couple of Matthew 18:15ff moments, sadly to a person they've disappeared. We've also had situations where someone comes in and wants to simply 'take-over' 1) was evangelism 2) was all women's ministry etc. those were a bit easier since they had no credibility and never were interested in taking the time to develop credibility.”

Elder C at Church B – “This church we had one lady that decided to make a stink about a particular problem at an annual meeting. She was well liked in the town, longtime

church member. Recently, when our church rebooted itself and joined the EFCA, we adopted a new constitution along with the EFCA's statement of faith. She decided to make a stink about this during an annual meeting, and finding no support for her view, left the church. This was literally the fastest I've ever seen a wolf leave. Previous church. Numerous 'wolves in sheep's clothing'. It would be easier for me to sum up rather than talk specifics in this venue. Wolves will sneak in, sound and look great, but are unable to hide their agenda for a long time. Eventually, their main motivators come out whether it be self-glorification (such as insistence in the music program, or other noticeable programs), self-righteousness (arguing with the Pastor on everything from doctrinal issues to church business), self-promotion (trying to run the church from behind-the-scenes), or outright clergy-killing (removal of Pastor through faction building). These agenda motivators take time to show up, but once they do, it is an accelerating process. An individual will give an indicator several months in, then another maybe a year, then every couple of weeks, then constantly.”

Elder D at Church F – “A wolf in sheep's clothing is usually someone who has a lot of respect in the congregation. This respect can be a result of the individual's occupation, their outward appearance, or something else that makes this person attractive to people in the congregation. These wolves will bring their agendas to the congregation through various forms. Some ways that I have seen this is through: Bible studies, personal phone calls, church meetings, and through family members. Wolves will often times twist scripture, so it fits with their agenda. Wolves will also take ideas from popular teachers and try to promote them within the congregation. These popular ideas are usually not biblical but are attractive to our sin nature.”

Elder E at Church G – “The most common problem with ‘wolves in sheep's clothing’ involve persons self-describing as ‘prophets’ or ‘apostles.’ They bring special revelation (from their own imagination) and attempt to form divisive alliances and bring false and unsubstantiated accusations.”

Question Eight: What effects, have you experienced or witnessed, can dealing with the unregenerate in a congregation have on a pastor?

Elder A at Church F – “It is painful and difficult, if you don’t deal with it quickly you can split the church.”

Elder B at Church B – “Thus far, if we start with when we were part of the Free Church, we've escaped the worst. If we go back further there were massive personal issues that impacted both leadership and spouses.”

Elder C at Church B – “Stressful and wearisome. It is a particular burden on the Pastor or Elder because to be in their position, they have somewhere in their gifting to be concerned about the unregenerate's condition.”

Elder D at Church F – “Working with unregenerate people can be frustrating and can lead to burn out. At times it can be difficult to stay focused on the mission of the church because the unregenerate are being a distraction. Unfortunately, when the unregenerate are a distraction for the pastor and/or elders, the rest of the congregation is impacted.”

Elder E at Church G – “Typically the unregenerate assist the congregants in keeping their lives on track with Jesus so they do not lose their witness among the unsaved. It seems to be a good thing that the unsaved are present, as they are demonstrating an openness to hear about God by their attendance. As stated previously, only the false prophets have given us significant problems.”

Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data from the interviews and questionnaires in search of themes, patterns, and other pertinent information. That information is presented below for each question.

Question One

The data presents several themes about this question. First, a regenerate person is someone who is born again (Jn. 3). They are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) who have received the indwelling Holy Spirit. An unregenerate person is not born anew in the Spirit. Second, regeneration is an act of God. It is God alone who saves and regenerates those dead in their sins. Third, a regenerate person will exhibit godly fruit in their lives in accordance with the Bible. It will be evident that the person truly is in Christ by how they love, live, and witness. The unregenerate might exhibit good works but are not of the Lord. Fourth, there will be evidence of change in the person's life from the point of conversion. An unregenerate person will not show Christ-like change that can only come from the Holy Spirit. Fifth, by faith, a regenerate person professes that Jesus is Lord and Savior. An unregenerate person might profess faith in Jesus but lacks the evidence already detailed.

These themes directly support and align with what the research illustrates previously in this project. In chapter one, the EFCA's practice of regenerate membership requires a distinction between those who are unregenerate and regenerate. Pastors and elders must be able to biblically define the difference between the two to determine if a person is ready for membership in a local church. There must be evidence of being born again in the Spirit, conversion, sanctification, and a testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.

Question Two

Several themes emerged from the data. First, not everyone who attends worship services or other church-related events is a regenerate believer. Question two caused the participants to think about those in their ministry contexts based on how they answered question one, and how they determined if someone is unregenerate or regenerate.

Second, there was an understanding that to be able to determine the spiritual status of someone in their congregations, pastors and elders must perform some judgment of the person. This is done through observation over a period of time in the person's life, behavior, knowledge, and practice of faith. Discernment must be practiced to determine if the person lives a life of faith in the Spirit, which produces godly fruit. These assessments or judgments are not done to condemn anyone. Instead, they are done in love to know how best to shepherd someone to the Lord. Matthew 7 did influence the responses to this question, as previously presented in chapter two. In addition, it was also understood that to be able to make noncondemning judgments and assessments, pastors and elders must examine their own walk and faith in the Lord.

Third, in conjunction with the wolves, goats, sheep, weeds, and wheat in Matthew's Gospel, the unregenerate and regenerate are permitted to live alongside each other in and out of the church until the final judgment at Christ's return. One pastor stressed the importance of making these types of judgments to know how best to counsel someone spiritually in his congregation. The process and guidance will look different depending on his assessment.

Fourth, making judgments and observations will help church leadership discover potential wolves and false teachings (Mt. 7) in their congregations. Bad fruit will be

evident alongside good fruit. There will be those who do works in the name of the Lord but are not in Him.

Fifth, some in their congregations believe they are regenerate, but more than likely, they are not. In chapter three, the research showed that this is a problem in many churches. False conversions, cheap grace, and works-based testimonies are often at the root of the problem. As the pastors and elders thought about some of the people in their congregations, some had serious concerns about people who claim to profess Christ but lack evidence of salvation, good fruit, or the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Question Three

The quantitative results of this question varied between each participant. However, the data revealed that the elders generally believed that the percentage of unregenerate people in their congregations was higher than what the pastors answered. The average for pastors was about 24%. The average for elders was about 55%. There were also some anomalies. First, Pastor B at Church B responded that he believes about 20% are unregenerate, while Elder C at the same church (Church B) claimed up to 65% (or 2/3) of the congregation were. Second, both elders from Church F responded with relatively higher percentages (60-80%) than the other churches of people they believe are unregenerate, revealing a potential problem at that church.

In relation to chapter two of this project and the theme of the “many and the few,” the data reveals that within the congregations represented, except for Church F, the “many” are regenerate believers while the “few” are unregenerate. In light of Matthew 7:13-14, as Pastor B at Church B shared, the “many and the few” theme most probably fits better outside of the church and out in the world where the regenerate are the “few,” and the unregenerate are the “many.”

Question Four

Three themes emerged from the responses to this question. The first theme is to ensure that the Gospel and the Word of God are being preached. In chapter two, one of the biblical duties of a pastor is to rightly handle the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:14-16). In chapter three, Brian Croft shared that one of the primary duties of a pastor is to preach the whole counsel of God's Word. Elder C at Church B was reminded that it is God who saves. God requires that His Word be preached because faith comes from hearing the Gospel (Rom. 10:17).

The second theme is to teach the Scriptures. In chapter two, a responsibility of a pastor is to be able to teach (2 Tim. 2:22-25a). Pastor A at Church A referenced Matthew's Gospel and all of the teachings of Jesus, including the Great Commission, in which Jesus stated to teach "them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). Teaching the truth of God's Word will protect against false teachings and oppose those who teach them. Regarding Cultural Christianity in chapter three, teaching the Scriptures is a strategy to correct faulty thinking and bad theology brought into a local congregation from the outside world.

The third theme is to shepherd the unregenerate in love. The "charge" of a pastor in 1 Timothy 1:5 from chapter two of this project is a crucial element to the duties of pastors and elders in that Paul tells Timothy that "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." This theme of loving the unregenerate is rooted in the Gospel. It serves those who are not yet regenerate. It treats them with dignity and worth. It tells the unregenerate person that God loves them so much that He sent His Son to die for their sins.

Question Five

One theme emerged from the responses to this question. That theme is that no prominent strategies are in place overall regarding shepherding the identified unregenerate. However, Church C offers a class on discovering the faith for those who might be unregenerate, and Church E employs a guest assimilation program to engage in conversations. Apart from these two churches, much of what was shared was actions already in place by the pastors and elders in question four, such as sharing the Gospel, asking them to read the Bible, and loving them. The lack of strategies for shepherding the unregenerate in local congregations is a crucial element of this project. The research shows that there is a need to develop strategies pastors and elders can implement in their churches.

Question Six

The central theme for this question from the participants is that all of them have dealt with unregenerate people in their congregations with various degrees of difficulties and challenges. Since the dynamics of each church represented are different, the situations were also different. As presented in chapter three of this project, pastors already face stress and difficulties when dealing with the duties and responsibilities of their callings. During the face-to-face interviews with the pastors, the researcher observed the tension and stress this question brought. Some of the encounters included struggles with the events at the United States Capital on January 6, 2021, carnal congregational meetings, unbiblical views on marriage, hard discussions about salvation, not liking change and growth, seeing church merely as a social gathering, seeking worldly accomplishments while neglecting a family, and personal agendas apart from what Scripture says. Lastly, Elder C at Church B shared the difficulties of trying to show

someone who thinks they are saved that they more than likely are not a regenerate believer. This was discussed in chapter three of this project as a direct challenge to pastors and elders in the context of Cultural Christianity.

Question Seven

All participants, except for one, have experienced at least one person in their congregations who matches Jesus' description of a "wolf in sheep's clothing" in Matthew 7:15-20 and chapter two of this project. In most cases, the person, or people, were causing division and disunity in the church either by attempting to take over a church through false teachings, bad theology, and unbiblical doctrine or by leading people astray from the Gospel. The data shows that in some instances, the wolves caused damage by infiltrating a small group or Bible study, making behind-the-scenes phone calls, or trying to implement personal agendas.

Question Eight

A theme that emerged from the results of the participant's responses is that dealing with some, not all, of the unregenerate in their congregations, can induce stress that causes loss of sleep, worry, a drain of energy, bitterness, interpersonal issues, frustration, weariness, and distraction. Some pastors and elders reported that dealing with the unregenerate can lead to burnout, as the research suggests in chapter three of this project. The effects shared by the participants align with the elements of burnout from the study by Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai¹¹⁶ in the form of personal accomplishment

¹¹⁶ Frederick, Dunbar, and Thai, 267-276.

(distraction), emotional exhaustion (feeling emotionally and physically drained), and depersonalization (bitterness and frustration).

In conclusion, the interviews and questionnaires provided valuable and objective data in support of the research presented in chapters one through three. The pastors and elders who participated are experts in the field in the Forest Lakes District, doing the will of God for His glory and kingdom. Their voices were heard, recorded, and the data were analyzed and presented. Lastly, in the next chapter, the researcher's findings from the biblical studies, review of relevant literature, and research has been synthesized and presented in addition to the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The research has come to a concluding point for this project. The Scriptures have been examined and reflected on. Relevant literature has been reviewed and studied. Interviews and questionnaires have been completed, and the data has been analyzed. The following is a presentation of the overall findings, perspectives, and recommendations. First, the strengths, weaknesses, and suggested improvements to the project will be examined.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Improvements

Strengths

The Word of God

A strength of this project was found in the Bible itself. The passages that were explored provided a strong foundation for researching the problem of the project. Matthew's Gospel provided several powerful themes, which set a tone and pace for the rest of the project. None of the passages explored were obscure or difficult to understand. Each provided a biblical perspective to the larger work of this paper. There were more passages the researcher wanted to reference about the project. However, this would have significantly expanded the size and depth of the project beyond the requirements. Since there are more passages that could have been examined, the strength is found in the realization that the biblical foundation for the project was not research based solely on one or two verses. Below is a list of other Bible passages that could have been referenced for this project:

1. *Luke 6:37-49* – This is Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, where he captures Jesus’ teaching on judging, good fruit and bad fruit, and disobedience by those calling Him “Lord, Lord.” Doing a side-by-side analysis of this passage with Matthew’s would provide a more in-depth exploration of the context.
2. *John 3:1-15* – Researching this passage would help explore the theological depths of what Jesus meant when he taught Nicodemus what it means to be born again. Since being born again and regeneration are synonymous, this passage provides foundational information to the problem of this project. In this passage, more specifically in John 3:7, the phrase born again can be translated from the New Testament Greek, γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν, as born from above. Studying this passage in its context would add a greater understanding of what it means to be born again.
3. *2 Corinthians 5:17* – As with John 3:1-15, exploring this verse in its context would provide clarity and more context to the biblical teaching of being regenerate as a new creation in Christ. Since the “old” refers to one’s life before being regenerated and washed by the Holy Spirit, the “new” refers to the new life as a justified and sanctified child of God. The “new” life comes with the blessings of being changed and transformed into the image of Jesus.
4. *Galatians 5:16-26* – The fruit of the Spirit has been mentioned several times in this project. However, an in-depth study of the text would have provided a more comprehensive look into what it means to be a new creation in Christ. Contrasting Paul’s list of sins of the flesh with the list of the fruit of the Spirit would provide a clearer perspective on what Scripture teaches and what pastors are looking for in the lives and behavior of their congregants.
5. *Romans 8:28-30/Ephesians 1:3-14* – Researching and exploring the biblical teaching on predestination and election would have brought depth and value to this project. Working out the theological truth of God’s sovereignty would have guided some of the focus toward those whom God called to salvation before the foundation of the world. This focus reminds pastors that it is God who saves according to His purpose and will. God has already determined whom He would save.

The Bible speaks to the issue of the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate. It defines who the unregenerate and regenerate are. It defines who are the wolves, goats, sheep, weeds, and wheat. It illustrates how Christianity is a minority religion in that “few” will find the narrow gate which leads to eternal life while the

“many” will walk through the wide and easy path that leads to destruction. The Bible teaches that leaders of the faith will encounter those who will cause harm in the church. Wolves in sheep’s clothing will get in among the sheep. The goats and the sheep will dwell together until the Last Day.

The Bible teaches pastors and elders how to deal with difficult people. It leads in encouraging church leaders to practice discernment in making judgments, not condemnation, of those in their flocks, to observe and search for good fruit, signs of conversion, and evidence of the Holy Spirit. It insists on and empowers pastors and elders to deal with those who stir up division, disunity, and persistent conflict.

Pastor Interviews

The interviews with the pastors were a strength and a blessing to the project. Each pastor provided expert perspectives seasoned with biblical truth and experience. The interactions were transformational both for the researcher and the participants. The questions caused each pastor to pause, pray, and think through each one carefully and biblically. Some of the questions were ones that they each needed to be asked for their own ministry. Their willingness to participate in the project was evidenced by their excitement. In some cases, their answers shocked them. These were ideas and concepts that some of them had never explored. However, because of the project, they eagerly engaged in hopes of finding answers and strategies to address their own difficulties they face in their ministry contexts when trying to shepherd the unregenerate.

The interviews allowed for openness and transparency. Each pastor was open to answering the questions. It did not seem as though anyone held back. Their honesty and willingness provided great value to the project. In most cases, what they shared aligned

with and supported the research that had already been conducted. In humility, none of them would self-describe as scholars. Instead, they each understand their role in the kingdom of God as servants guiding the sheep in their flocks while trying to love those not in Christ into the fold. Nonetheless, their participation, experiences, and biblical knowledge greatly value scholarship.

Commentaries

The availability and usage of scholarly commentaries added to the project's strength. Each author provided solid biblical exegesis to each passage explored. Their time, dedication, and insights into the text assisted the researcher in pulling out the meaning of the text. While all regenerate believers ought to be theologians in the Word of God, the authors of the commentaries used in the project brought their specialized and expert analysis of the text. Not everyone is able, or called, to the level of in-depth work each author provided. Lastly, while there are many commentaries in the world about the Bible, not all of them offer strong biblical truth and perspectives.

Below is a list of a few of the commentaries used and worth noting for the benefit of other researchers:

1. France, R.T. *Matthew: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. This technical commentary provides a well-rounded exposition of the text using the original language, historical context, and thorough exegesis. France's work in the Sermon on the Mount helped bring to light the context of Matthew 7 as a whole. When exploring the "many and the few" theme, the author provided a clear picture of what the text communicates, that Christianity is a minority religion in the scope of creation and the amount of true regenerate believers. Furthermore, the researcher has found that the entire Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (TNTC) series to be of great value for any biblical and theological study and research.
2. Sproul, R.C. *Matthew: An Exposition Commentary*. While not as technical as France's work, Sproul's commentary on Matthew's Gospel provided practical and pastoral theology to the research efforts. His work addresses

some of the current cultural aspects of Christianity while connecting it with sound exegesis. In addition, Sproul approaches the Scriptures from a Reformed position.

3. Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Letters of Timothy and Titus: The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Yarbrough's commentary provided extensive and technical work on the three epistles. For this project, it helped research the pastoral elements of Paul's letters, such as some of the duties and responsibilities.

Weaknesses

Lack of Scholarship

When the researcher began searching for scholarly journals and articles about the problem, it was discovered that very little was available. This proved to be challenging for the researcher. This was a weakness of the project in that there was a minimal amount of scholarship to help inform it. Even after exhausting multiple variations of search options using online databases and other resources, the researcher needed to move forward with the hope that the project itself would one day add to the scholarship. While, this project did implement scholarly works, each one referenced was not directly related to the topic. They each pertained to a smaller element of it.

Questionnaire

Another weakness of the project was the online questionnaire provided for the elders to complete. While it was deemed not feasible to meet with every elder in person, not meeting prevented the researcher from clarifying the questions on the questionnaire. Each elder did the best they could with the questions provided. However, it became clear to the researcher that there were some instances where an explanation of specific questions would have helped guide the direction of their answers more closely to the focus of the research. The questionnaires were valuable to the project. However, if the

researcher had modified the process, there would have been more clarity and explanation needed for each elder to complete the questionnaires more thoroughly.

Questions

The questions themselves could have been better designed to include a broader focus from the research which informed them. The researcher missed the cultural Christian aspect altogether and how that aspect of the research influenced how pastors and elders shepherd. It might have provided valuable insight into some of the difficulties they face in their ministry contexts. While the questions did cause the participants to think about how they make discerning judgments about people in their congregations, the problematic issue of cultural perspectives that exist in local churches does not exist in the project.

Improvements

A few modifications for improving the project are detailed in the following:

- Creating more precise and detailed questions that provided a greater explanation for the questionnaire.
- Providing an open line of communication for the elders to ask the researcher questions about the questionnaire. In some cases, the elders were asked to complete the questionnaire by the pastor the researcher interviewed.
- Ensure that all of the elders were personally contacted by the researcher.
- Further explore if meeting at least some of the elders in person would have been possible and feasible.

Overall Findings

The research has revealed that being a pastor called by God to shepherd His people is not an easy task. In many cases, it seems almost impossible to accomplish alone. The need for the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower and guide is an essential aspect of pastoral ministry. The number of biblical duties and responsibilities can become overwhelming. What the research has shown is that pastoring those who are regenerate in

a local congregation is already an enormous challenge. This becomes compounded when trying to shepherd the unregenerate. Pastors can find themselves in difficult situations as they try to lead someone who is not in Christ to Christ. As *Pastor D at Church D* shared, in some instances having conversations with someone who does not display evidence of salvation can lead to a person leaving the church and never returning. Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the unregenerate person cannot see the truth of the Gospel. Yet, out of love for the person, the pastor will often continue to pour out time, energy, and resources in prayerful hope that God changes the person's heart, that they are justified and regenerated by the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

The research did not directly explore why there are unregenerate people in local churches. In truth, it is the very place they need to be. Yet, some remain unregenerate even after years of attending. We all must be reminded that salvation is the work of God. There will be those who are not born again in the local church. The research has revealed in the teachings of Jesus that the regenerate, the elect, will dwell among the unregenerate. This includes the local church. The pastors who were interviewed understood that there are people in their congregations who are not yet saved and may never come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The research revealed that Christianity is a minority religion drawing from Matthew's theme of the "many and the few." However, that does not stop them from doing what they are called to do as pastors of God's flock.

Difficulties and tensions arise when a church or denomination practices regenerate membership, such as in the EFCA. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders are responsible for being gatekeepers of the flock. They are required not to allow unregenerate people into the church's membership. This requires them to judge and

discern the applicant's life, belief, and behavior. The research has shown that Matthew 7 permits and requires judgments, not condemnation, to determine if a person is a good tree bearing good fruit in the name of the Lord. It requires that pastors look for lives filled with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). *Pastor A at Church A* shared that there will be evidence of salvation in a person's life. In his ministry, he looks for good fruit in people's lives as well as an indication of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In addition, he stated that transformation, the Gospel being applied, repentance, and overcoming addictions and other sins should be present. As a pastor, he understands that he must make a judgment in assessing a person's life for elements of regeneration. The danger of not practicing discernment or assessments can result in wolves in sheep's clothing entering the flock, causing division, damage, and disunity. *Elder A at Church F* tersely shared that wolves can be "troublemakers, stirring up strife. Trying to lead sheep astray."

Unfortunately, sometimes wolves do get into the fold. This can happen by using lax standards when asking to hear the applicant's salvation testimony. In some cases, the current pastor inherited unregenerate members and wolves. Pastors must deal with them according to Scriptural standards. Conflict is an aspect of pastoral ministry. It must not be ignored. Consequently, this can bring more stress to the pastor's ministry and life, depending on the situation and circumstances. As the pastors reported in the interviews and the research revealed, it can lead to health issues and burnout. *Pastor A at Church A* shared that some in his church expressed concerns that he was facing burnout due to dealing with conflict and unregenerate people. He experienced sleep loss. He also faced the worry that comes with addressing and confronting conflict and tension in a church. He realized that he needed to take a step back to focus on his health and manage the

stress in his life. *Elder D at Church F* stated that he believes that “working with unregenerate people can be frustrating and can lead to burnout.” The same elder indicated that he believes 60-80% of his congregation are unregenerate. That particular church seems to be troubled and unhealthy. He has witnessed how trying to shepherd the unregenerate in that specific church becomes a distraction since there are so many. He stated, “Unfortunately, when the unregenerate are a distraction for the pastor and/or elders, the rest of the congregation is impacted.”

The research revealed some of the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate deal with unbiblical beliefs that have entered some local congregations. Cultural Christianity, cheap grace, and moralistic therapeutic deism are current threats to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are threats that cannot conquer the truth of God’s Word. However, they pose an enormous problem for pastors who desire to rightly handle the Word of God through sound biblical preaching and teaching. Cultural Christianity is a works-based ideology that loves the idea of Jesus but not the Jesus of the Bible. It speaks about a God of love but not of one who is holy. It lacks evidence of faith, godly fruit, a hunger for God’s Word, and regeneration. Pastors are faced with this problem often in the United States. One of the most difficult aspects of pastoral ministry is trying to show someone who is unregenerate that they are not born again. They are convinced their works are evidence of their salvation.

The cheap grace that Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned about is prominent in today’s churches in the form of easy believism. Saying a prayer during an altar call or repeating the sinner’s prayer does not by themselves lead to salvation. Many false conversions exist because of these methods. Some are convinced that because they did these types of

things, they are born again believers. Pastors examine their lives, looking for evidence of conversion, change, and sanctification. In some cases, none of these biblical elements of regeneration exist. What, then, is the pastor to do? These situations are trying as they can bring tension and conflict to the point of jeopardizing relationships.

Moralistic therapeutic deism causes difficulties for pastors in that some are seeking to be better people without the indwelling Holy Spirit who sanctifies. This view teaches that good people go to heaven and that God is merely a problem solver. For them, He is the genie in the sky. He never passes judgment, nor will He in the end. Life is only about happiness and feeling good. Denying oneself and taking up a cross is not an element of this ideology. This false teaching is a problem that must be met with the truth of God's Word. It must not be allowed to gain access to the teachings, preaching, and bible studies in local churches.

Another finding that emerged is when to evangelize and disciple someone in the church. Can an unregenerate person be discipled? This is a question that requires its own future research with an in-depth exploration of the differences and similarities between the two practices. However, it is one that deals directly with the difficulties pastors face when trying to shepherd the unregenerate. Pastors can spend much time in discipleship relationships with people who have not yet been born again. It is possible that not enough time evangelizing a person has occurred. It is common to spend five minutes evangelizing someone and then spend five years trying to disciple them. Pastors can get frustrated in these situations, especially when there seems to be no evidence of salvation and sanctification in the first place.

The research revealed that within the Forest Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America, no real substantive strategies are being employed in shepherding the unregenerate. The researcher was not too surprised by this revelation. As a pastor, he understands how overwhelming the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of shepherding the regenerate flock can be. At times, it is downright exhausting. However, pastors are entrusted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This beautiful Good News is for everyone. It is for the unsaved as well as the saved. While the pastor is called to shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), as a minister of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21), the pastor and every Christian are called to be an ambassador of Christ to the lost, including those in their congregations. As hard and difficult as it might be dealing with those who have not yet been regenerated, we must be reminded that we, too, were once alienated from God (Col. 1:21). That does not mean pastors should tolerate wolves and false teachings. The Bible speaks directly about this. It does mean, however, that pastors need to be more intentional about how they tend to the unregenerate for their sake and the sake of the regenerate.

Lastly, Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5 that, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” This is a crucial aspect of pastoral ministry. This applies to both the regenerate and the unregenerate. If love is not at the center of one’s ministry, then there is a disconnect between the calling and the work being done in the name of Jesus. Pastors and elders need to evaluate themselves often to discern and examine their own fruit and hearts. The author of Hebrews 12:15 wrote, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” Frustration can lead to gracelessness. Gracelessness can lead to bitterness. There

is a reason that Jesus taught that to judge rightly, one needs to examine the plank in their own eye first. May we all fall at the feet of Jesus in prayer, repentance, and thankfulness when leading those in our congregations to the King of kings.

Recommended Strategies

The main premise of this project was to explore the difficulties pastors face when trying to shepherd the unregenerate within their congregations. As a part of this journey, the researcher sought to understand if any strategies were being employed within the FLD that deal with the unregenerate. The researcher discovered a substantial need for a definitive strategy in ministering to the unregenerate. As an application to what has been learned through the research and to provide a strategic approach in shepherding the unregenerate, the researcher offers the following model using the acronym **PASTORS**:

Preach the Word. In 2 Timothy 4:2, the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” This command applies to all pastors in the ministry of the Word. Since “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17), it is vital that the whole counsel of God be preached and taught consistently and correctly. Sound biblical preaching includes exegeting the text by exploring the meaning through a careful examination of the context, authorial intent, and historical relevance. It answers the questions of “what does the text say?”, “what does it mean?” and “how can we apply it to our faith in Christ?” Self-help or “five ways to be a better person” messages are not preaching God’s holy Word. Sermons ought not to be about the preacher’s life and experiences. They are not about entertaining stories or events. Instead, preaching the Word of God is an exposition of the text. God is the main character and the hero. Paul says in Romans 1:16b that the Gospel “is the power of God

for salvation to everyone who believes.” The unregenerate in our congregations need to hear the Word being preached. Nothing else will save them. Pray over the text, read the text, study the text, and proclaim the text.

Assume not everyone is regenerate. Pastors must understand that just because someone says they are a Christian does not necessarily mean they have been born again as a new creation in Christ. Jesus’ frightening words in Matthew 7:21-23 uphold this reality. Not everyone who does good works in His name will enter the kingdom of heaven. There will be instances when someone attending openly states that they are not a Christian. However, there are times when many will claim to know Christ. It would be a wonderful thing if everyone were regenerate. However, the reality is that this is not the case. This also applies to the membership. It is possible that not every member of the church has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The importance of this is to be aware of who is in the congregation. Wolves in sheep’s clothing might have slipped in undetected. It also stands as a reminder to continuously preach the Gospel and the Word of God fervently.

Speak to the unregenerate about Jesus Christ one-on-one. Pastors are encouraged to speak to the people in their congregations personally. This especially applies to newcomers. It is an excellent opportunity to answer any questions or explain information about the church. These conversations can often provide a cursory window into their beliefs and understanding of the Gospel. In addition, it is a great time to evangelize. Whether the person is unregenerate or not, a proclamation of the Gospel is for everyone. These conversations also help build a potential relationship between the pastor and the attendee. Here, the person gets to hear the pastor’s heart and love for Jesus.

Try to determine where someone is in their faith journey. A point of the previous step in having preliminary conversations is to help determine if follow-up conversations are needed to determine where someone is in their journey. Practice active listening techniques and listen carefully. Ask personal and biblical questions. Do not make the conversations about you. The point here is to learn where the person has been and is going in their life with Jesus. Try to determine if they are: (1) in the faith, (2) infants in Christ and not able to use theological terms, or (3) seasoned saints who joyfully speak the Word.

Observe and discern if there is good fruit, evidence of sanctification, a hunger for the Word, and a love for Jesus. This step is done over a period of time. It is the process of assessing or judging a person's life in the congregation by looking for several biblical elements of genuine faith. First, over time, is there evidence of good fruit by the Holy Spirit? Is the person serving the church in a ministry? Are they giving rather than receiving? Is it done with joy? Second, is there evidence of sanctification? Is the person changing and being formed into the image of Christ? Are addictions, sin, or idols being conquered by the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Do they love better? Do you see Christ in them in an increasing measure? Is it genuine? Third, do they have a genuine hunger for God's Word? Are they reading the bible? Are they a part of a small group or bible study? Are they able to answer when asked what they are reading in the Bible? Is their theological understanding growing and increasing? Fourth, do they exhibit a genuine love for Jesus? Does this love display forgiveness to others? Is it lived out in faith and trust in what God has done, is doing, and promises to do in the future?

The answers to these questions are essential for pastors to determine and wrestle with. They will help the pastor know how best to lead and guide the person. They will decide if more time evangelizing the person is needed or if the person is ready for discipleship. They will reveal any potential motives. This is helpful if there is a suspicion that the person might be a wolf. They will assist and guide the pastor in approaching spiritual counseling sessions. Lastly, if there is evidence of the above, what a great time to celebrate with the person for what the Lord is doing in their lives.

Remind yourself that salvation is the work of God alone. Pastors need to be reminded that it is God alone who saves. That weight does not need to fall on the pastor. While the pastor is called to walk in obedience to God to fulfill their calling, they, ultimately, are not responsible for someone's salvation. As the prophet Ezekiel was called and responsible for the proclamation of God's Word to the people of Israel (Ezek. 3:16-21), it is similar to the office of the pastor. Proclaim the Word, teach the truth, shepherd, and love the flock. The rest is between the sovereign Lord God Almighty and the person.

Self-care is an essential step of this strategy to promote longevity and guard against burnout. Several actions can be taken to reduce stress, combat bitterness, and avoid the pitfalls of burning out. First, daily time with the Lord practicing spiritual disciplines is required. This should include reading and studying God's Word, sitting quietly in the presence of God in prayer, and meditating on His Word throughout the day. These will help maintain the pastor's vertical relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, it is important to have accountability measures in place, such as reporting to the church's elders or other leaders often to provide an update on the pastor's well-being.

Third, a focus on physical health and diet is needed to ensure perseverance and the ability to perform the duties of the calling physically.

In this project's next and final chapter, the researcher shares personal details about his journey through the Doctor of Ministry program at Bethel Seminary. This includes elements of his spiritual growth and formation. Lastly, the researcher provides further possible questions this project has raised.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

The Journey

This project has been an amazing blessing for the researcher. The Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) journey began when the researcher was in the final semester at Bethel Seminary in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree program. He sought the Lord's guidance about what the next leg of the journey would be. The Holy Spirit led him to pursue this final stage in his higher Christian education experience. As the researcher prayed about his dissertation, he sought input from family and other pastors. The topic of shepherding the unregenerate, and the difficulties which surround it, is one that the researcher constantly heard from other pastors was desperately needed. The researcher was repeatedly thanked for his willingness to explore and research this common issue in pastoral ministry.

The researcher did not know at the time that he would be heading into a season of tension and conflict in his ministry. That season was a trying time. It required the researcher and the church elders to assess where the conflict was coming from. Judgments needed to be made. Actions were required to be taken. Some wolves in sheep's clothing had slipped through the open gates of loose membership practices from the prior leadership and pastorate. The stress of Covid 19 and other related challenges exacerbated the problems. During the research process of this project, the problem was genuine for the researcher. He was living it while writing it.

The researcher grew in his understanding of the problem and his knowledge of what the Scriptures say about it. Researching and writing chapter two was such a fantastic blessing. The time, energy, and resources dedicated to carefully exegeting the text, pouring over the commentaries, and processing all of the information during that stage brought clarity and insight to the researcher in ways he had not experienced before. Jesus' teachings in Matthew 7 spoke to the researcher and informed the writing of chapter two. Those passages are not easy to process internally. They cause the reader to examine themselves first. They strike at one's heart. The last thing a regenerate believer in Jesus Christ wants is to condemn anyone or practice unhealthy judgments on others. The call to look deep inside first was eye-opening and raw. When we find ourselves at the feet of Jesus, looking up at his glorious face, we are humbled and reminded that we, too, were once alienated from the Lord by our disobedience and sin. This humility is needed before a pastor, or elder begins to address problems and tensions brought about by unregenerate people. Unfortunately, this is not always the starting place for many. Hurt, pain, betrayal, and many other negative feelings can be at the front of the charge for correction and discipline.

The journey through the pastoral epistles was a welcomed reminder of the roles, responsibilities, and duties of pastors. It helped ground and root expectations found in the Bible. Too often, pastoral ministry expectations are rooted in secular business models or unrealistic needs-based expectations by congregants. The pastoral epistles command what pastors should do and demand what they should not do. One foundation of the calling that encouraged the researcher was that a pastor is called to shepherd the flock. The flock is made up of sheep. The sheep are the regenerate believers. Jesus' distinction in Matthew's

Gospel between those in His flock and those who are not became clear to the researcher during the writing process. A pastor cannot shepherd a wolf or even a goat. This biblical teaching reinforces the calling of pastoral ministry. However, difficulties and challenges arise when some unregenerate people begin to stir up strife, cause division and disunity, and promote false teachings. The title of this dissertation was meant to provoke reflection on this theological matter.

The researcher gained a better perspective on some of the unbiblical ideologies and concepts that seep into local churches. Many of them are in the guise of Christianity, which makes it more difficult to catch them at first. All pastors, elders, and church leaders need a solid understanding of the Scriptures so that they can be more easily detected and addressed since Bible literacy levels are so low in our current generation. The secularization of the churches in America is an ongoing issue. It needs to be addressed head-on with biblical truth and preaching.

The effects of cultural Christianity can seem overwhelming at times. As the researcher dug deeper into this element of pastoral ministry, he began to understand the depth of its negative and eternal impact on local churches. It is a false belief system that claims Jesus but does not deny itself or surrender to the Lordship of Christ in repentance and obedience. It seeks the gifts but not the Giver. It picks and chooses which Bible verses it likes and tries to discard the others. It speaks about the love of God while denying or ignoring His holiness. Cultural Christianity is a false religion that produces false conversions. Many are convinced they are saved based on some actions they took or proclaimed. Yet, their lives show no evidence of being justified by faith or regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Pastors are expected to shepherd them nonetheless.

If no fruit is visible over time and no evidence of transformation or growth is observed, the pastor has to make a prayerful decision on how to approach and guide such people. Dean Inserra's powerful realization captures these moments best when he says, "Getting someone who thinks he's a Christian to see that he is actually *not* is a delicate and sensitive endeavor, but not unique to our time."¹¹⁷ The researcher has experienced many of these situations in his ministry. This project brought light to the issue. It helped explain and define what many pastors have struggled with in their ministries.

The researcher sought to explore and research if burnout can be a side effect of dealing with the unregenerate in a local church. The research showed that it is possible. Since pastoral ministry is already a difficult calling, it can take time to pinpoint precisely what the cause of burnout might be. However, if a pastor is embroiled in constant conflict and dealing with multiple wolves, these stressors can lead to burnout over time. Each situation is different. There are many variables to consider and evaluate. However, burnout is a possibility for pastors when dealing with problematic, unregenerate people in their congregations.

The researcher grew in understanding that love ought to be at the root of all aspects of pastoral ministry. During the pastor interviews, he could hear the pain and frustration, and in some cases bitterness, in the voices of the pastors. He heard and has experienced how difficult it can be to be loving and kind toward those who have hurt you or others in a church. This can be some of the most challenging situations in a pastor's ministry. Paul's encouragement to Timothy, and all pastors, in 1 Timothy 1:5 became a

¹¹⁷ Inserra, 15.

thematic verse in this project when he said, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Pastors know that this verse is not always easy to grasp and practice. However, it is the truth rooted in the love of God. The researcher was reminded that it was the love of God that sent His Son to the cross for a wretch like him who did not deserve it. Amen, and to God be the glory.

Further Reflections

The Sermonic Challenge

Stepping into the scholarly research world was challenging for the researcher. Simply put, he wanted to preach. He needed to edit and rewrite whole sections on multiple occasions because they were sermonic. Preaching is one of the top spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has blessed the researcher with. The urge to preach had to be consciously controlled during the research and writing. This was an entirely new learning experience. At times, the researcher wanted to refer to himself as “the researcher” in conversations outside the project.

The Research

Through the M.Div. and D.Min. programs, the researcher felt that Bethel Seminary prepared him well for the thesis research process. Access to the many databases and library resources was a blessing. The researcher was at ease knowing he could contact someone and receive a timely response if he needed assistance. One thing that emerged from all of this was that the researcher learned he loves to do research. The time spent in the Scriptures and commentaries was productive and enlightening. The face-to-face pastor interviews were powerful, insightful, and relational. The literature review proved to be a bit difficult. The researcher could not discover much about the problem in

scholarly journals, books, or other sources. The researcher wonders if there might be a disconnect between academia and pastoral praxis and theology on the matter.

Doxology

It was encouraged that the research, writing the dissertation, and reporting of the project were to be doxological in nature. The researcher can affirm that, for him, it was. Through many hours of research, writing, editing, and revising, the researcher maintained a thankful heart to God for the many blessings and learning moments. This is not to say there were no moments when the researcher wanted to pack it all up and quit. There were several moments, but the Lord kept reminding him to keep striving to finish the work and present the report for His glory.

Questions For Another Day

Several questions arose during the research and writing for future research considerations. A list with brief comments is provided below:

1. *Can an unregenerate person be disciplined?* The project briefly touched upon the concepts of evangelism and discipleship and how to know when to practice each one depending on where the person is in their faith journey.
2. *What can pastors do when they discover their membership is comprised of many who are unregenerate?* New pastors often inherit the membership when answering the call to a specific church. It can take time for a pastor to get to know all members adequately. What are some strategies if it is determined that many of the members in a regenerate membership model church are unregenerate?
3. *How does a pastor's position on the doctrine of predestination and election influence how the problem of this thesis is approached?* A compare and contrast approach between the sovereignty of God in the election of His saints and the free will of decisional regeneration would bring tremendous value to scholarship and pastoral theology.

Conclusion

This journey has been a unique and insightful blessing. The topic of research was a difficult one that needed to be explored. However, it needs to be explored much further and in greater depth. It was well worth the time and energy. The researcher is hugely grateful for the opportunity to walk this journey with Bethel Seminary. To God be the Glory. Amen.

APPENDIX A: PASTOR'S INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pastor, please review and pray about these questions before the interview. Feel free to write down answers or any notes. All responses will be kept confidential.

Question #1	Biblically, how do you define who is unregenerate and regenerate?
Answer	
Question #2	How do you determine if someone is unregenerate or regenerate in your congregation? Does Matthew 7 play in your assessment, if so, how?
Answer	
Question #3	Using percentages, describe how many in your congregation are unregenerate? How do the following passages influence your answer? (Matthew 7:13-14, 9:37-38, and 22:14)
Answer	
Question #4	How do you shepherd those you have identified as unregenerate in your congregation?
Answer	
Question #5	What strategies do you employ when shepherding the unregenerate?

Answer	
Question #6	Please share a few difficult and challenging experiences you have faced when shepherding the unregenerate in your congregation.
Answer	
Question #7	Describe how you have experienced “wolves in sheep’s clothing” in your congregation.
Answer	
Question #8	What effects, have you experienced or witnessed, can dealing with the unregenerate in a congregation have on a pastor?
Answer	

APPENDIX B: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ELDERS

Elder, please prayerfully answer these questions to the best of your ability. All questionnaires will be kept confidential.

Question #1	Biblically, how do you define who is unregenerate and regenerate?
Answer	
Question #2	How do you determine if someone is unregenerate or regenerate in your congregation? Does Matthew 7 play in your assessment, if so, how?
Answer	
Question #3	Using percentages, describe how many in your congregation are unregenerate? How do the following passages influence your answer? (Matthew 7:13-14, 9:37-38, and 22:14)
Answer	
Question #4	How do you shepherd those you have identified as unregenerate in your congregation?
Answer	
Question #5	What strategies do you employ when shepherding the unregenerate?

Answer	
Question #6	Please share a few difficult and challenging experiences you have faced when shepherding the unregenerate in your congregation.
Answer	
Question #7	Describe how you have experienced “wolves in sheep’s clothing” in your congregation.
Answer	
Question #8	What effects, have you experienced or witnessed, can dealing with the unregenerate in a congregation have on a pastor?
Answer	

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Interview Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate. I hope to learn strategies and practices to help pastors address these difficulties and avoid burnout. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Senior Pastor in the Forest Lakes District in the EFCA. This research is for a Doctor of Ministry (Biblical and Theological Engagement) thesis at Bethel Seminary.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked questions regarding your ministry context as a Senior Pastor pertaining to what you have found to be effective practices in theologically defining the unregenerate in your congregations and strategies on how you shepherd them. In addition, I will ask questions pertaining to your perspective and experience relating to this topic. The interview will take no longer than one hour. The data will be recorded using notes from the interview. Your participation in the interview will be a valuable resource to the research project. The goal is to develop strategies and best practices for pastors to protect their well-being and avoid burnout.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the researcher in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. This research project has been approved by my research advisor in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call or email the researcher Mike Deckman (860-705-2792, mid24565@bethel.edu) or the Thesis Advisor, Dr. David Wick (651-216-4006, dhw32532@bethel.edu).

To indicate your willingness to participate, please reply by email with this message "I agree to participate in this research project." If you decide to not participate, no response is needed.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Age?
2. Current church name and location?
3. Current church average attendance?
4. How long have you been a pastor at your current church?
5. How long have you been a pastor?

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Questionnaire Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of the difficulties pastors face when shepherding the unregenerate. I hope to learn strategies and practices to help pastors address these difficulties and avoid burnout. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an Elder in the Forest Lakes District in the EFCA. This research is for a Doctor of Ministry (Biblical and Theological Engagement) thesis at Bethel Seminary.

If you decide to participate, I will ask questions regarding your ministry context as an Elder pertaining to what you have found to be effective practices in theologically defining the unregenerate in your congregations and strategies on how you shepherd them. In addition, you will be asked questions pertaining to your perspective and experience relating to this topic. The questionnaire should take no longer than twenty minutes based on the length of your answers. The data will be recorded in the completed questionnaire. Your participation in the questionnaire will be a valuable resource to the research project. The goal is to develop strategies and best practices for pastors to protect their well-being and avoid burnout.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the researcher in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. This research project has been approved by my research advisor in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call or email the researcher Mike Deckman (860-705-2792, mid24565@bethel.edu) or the Thesis Advisor, Dr. David Wick (651-216-4006, dhw32532@bethel.edu).

APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONS

1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been an elder at your current church?
3. How long have you been an elder in total, including other churches?
4. What is the name of your current church?
5. What is the average attendance?
6. Where is your church located?

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