

# **Voices: Pastors, we must remember our calling and stay in our lane**

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Pastors, as Paul told Timothy, we serve the noble call to be Christ's under-shepherd to his flock. Our call means we must weigh our words when speaking beyond our authority. The social media posts of some among us do not seem so carefully weighed.

As the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, church and ministry leaders have needed to find the balance between addressing physical and spiritual needs. Pastors have had to work through how best to shepherd, while complying with recommendations of health experts and government decrees. We are guided by love for our neighbors in doing so.

Many Christians, churches, conventions and religious organizations have worked diligently—and sometimes at great personal risk—to minister to physical and spiritual needs during the months of the pandemic. These groups and individuals have brought their expertise to bear where it has been needed most.

Unfortunately, in response to medical uncertainties and changing policies, some pastors have gone beyond their expertise in their social media posts. They have gone from pastoring to pontificating.

Being a pastor does not necessarily translate to being an immunologist, a medical doctor, a politician, a constitutional expert or a police officer. Exceptions include those bivocational pastors who are members of one of these professions. Most of us are not.

# Pastor, be content pastoring

Pastors are empowered and imbued with authority extending only so far as our office and Scripture allow. Some in our congregations may see us as a bridge between them and God and may associate our words with his authority. The danger is that our opinions may run afoul of our congregants enjoying Christian liberty where they do have it.

While we as pastors are to bring God's wisdom to bear in the world right now—which includes the pandemic—we must be cautious in bringing the word of God to bear on specific matters like wearing masks in public. More and more ministers of God's word seem to be speaking authoritatively on such matters without having any such authority.

Our work has been ordained from heaven down, not from earth up. We likely are not representatives of the Centers for Disease Control, but we certainly are representatives of Christ. We can offer opinions cautiously, but few of us can speak as medical or governmental authorities.

Leaders and laypersons alike, let our duly elected and appointed officials fret about viruses and issues of governance. Let us preach “the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” to the hearts of men (Romans 1:16 KJV).

Pastors, we have the open secret that can cure all illnesses—moral, physical or spiritual. This open secret is Jesus Christ, who will “wipe away every tear from their eyes” and in whom “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying [or] pain” (Revelation 21:4 NKJV). This is the authority we have in these fearful times.

Pastors, we must engage the world right now with wisdom and humility, realizing we are as fallible as the next person. This is new ground for us all. As we bring the gospel to bear now, let us do as Paul taught Timothy, not

dividing over masks, but rightly dividing the word of truth for the sake of winning souls and not arguments.

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