

Essays & Ideas

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#104, An Idea

Pastor, Consider Your Church

I understand that we have made retiring kin to apostasy and that more than one pastor has beat his chest while proclaiming he would never retire. Fine. Don't I didn't really want you to anyway. But at least be realistic about the fact that you, **like every other human**, are growing old and it is only wise to prepare for that occasion.

We do two years east of the Mississippi River and two years west of it. Although I do have some yearly meetings I am in a different church almost every week. They are all King James Bible believing Baptist churches. Many have had the same pastor for 10, 20, 30 or more years. I think that longevity speaks volumes of the stability of our churches. But recently four different churches I've preached in have shriveled to nothing or even closed. I can foresee this happening to several others in the not-too-distant future. How is it that we can have the right Book, the right Message and the right church government and our churches shrivel and close? Simple. It's the pastor. I am a believer of the adage that "It all rises and falls on leadership." Well, the fact is that we all get old. Sometimes the zeal to knock on doors and visit church folks suffers due to this. The church declines in attendance until the pastor sees no hope it ever recovering. Sadly, he's also convinced that no one else can save it so it becomes a convenient paycheck. The problems is that **a church belongs to the Lord** and not to a human. I think there is no more important individual in a church than the pastor. He is the **only** one God called to lead it. He is the **only** one God called to feed it. But it doesn't exist just to assure him a paycheck. The survival of a local church is more important than the survival of any human.

Do I believe there is a set time or age that a pastor should retire? Unlike the Levite, whom God told to retire at age 50, there is no time, age or circumstance that mandates the retirement of a pastor. (If you are one of those manipulative, back-stabbing, vicious Christians, don't go to your pastor with this Essay in hand and say, "See, even Gipp thinks it's time for you to hit the road!" Actually, your church would probably be better off if **you** hit the road.) It is up to every pastor to determine when it's time for him to move over and let someone younger take over the church. (As much as I lov'em, many of the "thirty-somethings" who are assistant pastors think their pastor needs to turn the church over to them **way too early** because they think they can do a better job of running it. To them I say, "**Go out and START a church if you think you'll be so good at pastoring!**")

From 30 years of preaching around the world here is an observation I've made. A pastor generally draws to his church people that are 10 years older and younger than his age to his church. If he's 50 he best reaches the 40-60 crowd. That's why a younger assistant tends to generate younger new members. A 30 year old will draw 20-40s into the church. All churches need younger folks entering the congregation or it simply "ages out" and dies. A church **must** reach younger people. That is **not** to diminish the value of mature, solid older members. Nor is it an excuse to throw out the hymns and drag in the drums. You don't want your church end up like a nursing home but turning your church into a teenage night club is simply not the answer.