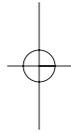
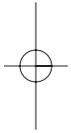
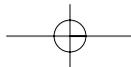
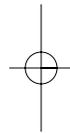
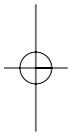
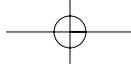


BROTHERS,
WE ARE
NOT
PROFESSIONALS





JOHN PIPER

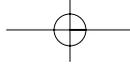


BROTHERS,
WE ARE
NOT
PROFESSIONALS

A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



© 2002
by Desiring God Foundation
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

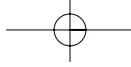
0-8054-2620-5

Published by Broadman & Holman Publishers
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 253
Subject Heading: CHURCH AND MINISTRY

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Others translations are indicated by acronym as follows: KJV, King James Version. NASB, the New American Standard Bible, © the Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977; used by permission. NIV, New International Version, © copyright 1973, 1978, 1984. RSV, Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973. Quotations indicated JP are the author's own translations. *Italic in Biblical text is added by the author for emphasis.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 07 06 05 04 03 02

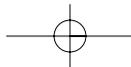
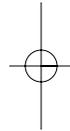
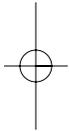


DEDICATION



To
George Verwer
and
Greg Livingstone

whose passion and perseverance in the pursuit
of the unreached peoples of the world
have pushed me toward radical commitment
to the global purposes of Jesus Christ
on the other side of
pastoral professionalism



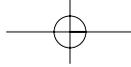
PREFACE

SOMETIMES MASSIVE suffering comes so close to home that for a brief season the fog of our foolish security clears, and we can see the sheer precipice of eternity one step away. The cold wobble passes through our thighs, and for a moment everything in the universe looks different. Those are good times for pastoral realism. Oh, how hollow much of our lives and ministry seem in those moments! The last thing we regret then is being less professional.

The beginning of the twenty-first century is a good time to be a pastor, a time full of uncertainty and danger. The political and religious atmosphere of the world pushes us—if we have ears to hear—relentlessly toward the unprofessional center of faith and ministry: the brutal, bloody, hideous, heaving, crucified God-Man Jesus Christ. We are driven more and more in these years to say with the apostle Paul, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . . Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14).

Insulated Western Christianity is waking from the dreamworld that being a Christian is normal or safe. More and more, true Christianity is becoming what it was at the beginning: foolish and dangerous. “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). “The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (John 16:2).

The rise of radical Islam simply intensifies the ever-present truth: preaching Christ crucified ruins professional pastoral politeness and wakens us to the wreckage of relativistic pluralism.



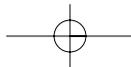
BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS

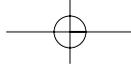
Professional harmony shatters on the rocks of Golgotha. Professional peacekeepers rush to the podium to announce the common ground of monotheism and everybody's high regard for the prophet Jesus. But "they have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). Real pastors know differently and love their people better. They do not nullify the grace of God by minimizing the centrality of the cross. The all-important, and pervasively rejected, truth is this: "[He] was delivered up [to death] for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

This is precisely what Islam denies. Thus one Sunni Muslim says, "Muslims believe that Allah saved the Messiah from the ignominy of crucifixion much as Allah saved the Seal of the Prophets from ignominy following *Hijra*."¹ And another adds, "We honor him [Jesus] more than you do. . . . Do we not honor him more than you do when we refuse to believe that God would permit him to suffer death on the cross? Rather, we believe that God took him to heaven."² The issue is *not* whether Islam is monotheistic. The issue is *not* whether Islam tries to honor Jesus. The issue is: Does Islam—or any other faith besides Christianity—cherish the crucifixion of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as the only ground of our acceptance with God? The answer is no. Only Christians "follow the Lamb"

1. Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Nairobi: Usima Press, 1980), 141. *Hijra* refers to the flight of Muhammad from Mecca in A.D. 622. It is derived from Arabic *hijrah*, literally, flight. The portion of the Koran that provides the basis for this denial of the crucifixion and resurrection says, "And for their [the Jews'] saying: 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God'—yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that [*shubihah lahum*] was shown to them. Those regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty—no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise" (4:157/156–57). Quoted from, J. Dudley Woodberry, editor, *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1989), 165.

2. Quoted from a 1951 article in *The Muslim World* in J. Dudley Woodberry, ed., *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, 164. Similar things were being said by Muslim clerics in the early years of this century as well, "We believe in Jesus; more than you do, in fact."





JOHN PIPER

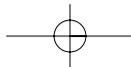
who was “slain” as the one and only Redeemer who sits on the “throne” of God (Rev. 14:4; 5:6; 7:17).

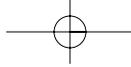
In other words, the center of Christianity and the center of pastoral life is the dishonorable, foolish, gruesome, and utterly glorious reality of the tortured God-Man, Jesus Christ. More and more, He must become the issue. Not a vague, comfortable, pleasant Jesus that everybody likes but the one who is a “stumbling block” to Jews and “foolishness” to Gentiles. The closer you get to what makes Christianity ghastly, the closer you get to what makes it glorious. “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal. 2:21). No gore, no grace, no glory. All religions that deny the cross nullify the grace of God and lead people to perpetual ruin. Preaching that truth ill-fits today’s professionalism.

Beware of replacing real truth-based tolerance with spurious professional tolerance. Once upon a time tolerance was the power that kept lovers of competing faiths from killing each other. It was the principle that put freedom above forced conversion. It was rooted in the truth that coerced conviction is no conviction. That is true tolerance. But now the new professional tolerance denies that there *are* any competing faiths; they only complement each other. It denounces not only the effort to *force* conversions but also the idea that any conversion may be necessary. It holds the conviction that no religious conviction should claim superiority over another. In this way, peaceful parity among professionals can remain intact, and none need be persecuted for the stumbling block of the cross (Gal. 5:11).³

The aim of this book is to spread a radical, pastoral passion for the supremacy and centrality of the crucified and risen God-Man, Jesus Christ, in every sphere of life and ministry and culture. Increasingly, a

3. This paragraph is adapted from John Piper, “Hate and Tolerance: Obstacles to the Eternal Life of Muslims,” *World Magazine*, 27 October 2001, 65.



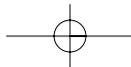


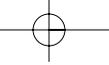
BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS

ministry under the banner of Christ's supremacy will be offensive to the impulses of professional clergy who like to be quoted respectably by the local newspaper. The title of this book is meant to shake us loose from the pressure to fit in to the cultural expectations of professionalism. It is meant to sound an alarm against the pride of station and against the expectation of parity in pay and against the borrowing of paradigms from the professional world. Oh for radically Bible-saturated, God-centered, Christ-exalting, self-sacrificing, mission-mobilizing, soul-saving, culture-confronting pastors! Let the chips fall where they will: palm branches one day, persecution the next.

I know some folks will quickly point out that there are sick shepherds who, in the name of countercultural ministry, need to offend people and can't flourish without a fight. Other critics will instruct us that incompetence is not a virtue. Others will remark that finding favor in the guild is not all bad. And, of course, there will be many rankled by the word *brothers*. To all these I say, yes, you have a point. I receive it. If you believe that such things are the crying need of our age, then say them. But that is not my assessment of things.

For every sick shepherd who offends unnecessarily, a hundred are so frightened to offend that the sword of the Spirit has become rubber in their mouths and the mighty Biblical mingling of severity and kindness has vanished from their ministry. For every incompetent pastor who justifies himself with spiritual coverings, a hundred incompetent pastors are desperately doubling their spiritual incompetence by seeking remedies in Babylon. For every pastor who enjoys respect in the guild in spite of prophetic faithfulness to the cross, a hundred pastors enjoy that respect because the cross has been compromised. And to those who want me to write for "brothers *and* sisters," I say, let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. As for me, the Biblical teaching is clear: God calls spiritual, humble, Christlike men to lead the family as husbands and to lead





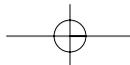
JOHN PIPER

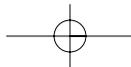
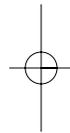
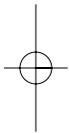
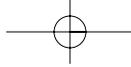
the church as elders (Eph. 5:20–33; 1 Tim. 2:12–13).⁴ I believe, and I have experienced for twenty years, that godly, gifted, articulate, intelligent, ministering women flourish in such families and churches.

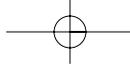
My vision of the pastoral ministry is full of joy. Flying over our embattled labor is the banner of Hebrews 13:17, “Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” And the apostolic trumpets resound: “Shepherd the flock of God . . . not under compulsion but willingly, . . . not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1 Pet. 5:2). There are many tears, to be sure. But, as Paul said, we are “sorrowful, yet *always* rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). In fact the tears deepen and intensify the joy of our hope (James 1:2–4; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 4:17).

There are not only tears; there are antagonists. “A wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are *many adversaries*” (1 Cor. 16:9). We could wish for peace. And we should labor for unity in the truth. But in this fallen world the gospel is always the aroma of life for some and the aroma of death for others (2 Cor. 2:15–16). So ours is a besieged joy but will always be undaunted because of the triumph of Christ. And ours is a tearful joy, but our tears are the tears of God-centered joy impeded in the extension of itself to others. The peace and satisfaction of our aching souls—and our hungry churches and the waiting nations—flow not from the perks of professional excellence but from the pleasures of spiritual communion with the crucified and risen Christ. I am jealous to spread this joy to (and through) my fellow pastors, which is why I say, “Brothers, we are not professionals.”

4. See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991).







A WORD OF THANKS

FIRST, I THANK Jesus Christ who called me to the ministry of the Word during a three-week sickness with mononucleosis at Wheaton College when I was twenty years old and then focused that call onto the pastorate in 1979 when I was thirty-three.

I thank the people of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis for making Hebrews 13:17 a reality for me since the summer of 1980. “Let [pastors keep watch over your souls] with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

I thank Justin Taylor and Vicki Anderson who assist me in so many ways that a hundred burdens are lifted that would otherwise make projects like this impossible. Justin also took on the subject index and added one more way the book might be useful.

I thank my wife Noël for thirty-three years of faithfulness. In everything I do I lean on her.

I thank Eileen Anderson who devoted her excellent skills to preparing the person and text indexes.

I thank Don Anderson, the former editor of *The Standard*, the denominational magazine of the Baptist General Conference, for stirring me up to write twenty of these chapters for that magazine.

And I thank Len Goss at Broadman & Holman for his eagerness and support in shepherding this book through the publishing process.

God has been kind to me, and I pray that, while I have breath, I may be a good steward of His grace in spreading a passion for His supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ my Lord.

