

## BOOK SUMMARY

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# The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great

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# BE UNITED IN CHRIST BOOK SUMMARY

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*Book Summary: The Book of Pastoral Rule*  
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# Be United In Christ

Book Summary

*The Book of Pastoral Rule*

Gregory the Great

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## **Author**

“Servant of the servants of God.” This is how Gregory referred to himself though Bishop of Rome. It was a humble title from a humble man, especially one who exercised such influence. Gregory is considered one of four “Doctors” of the Western church. He is one of two popes to be designated “Great,” and fifteen subsequent popes respectfully took his name. He is the first monk to become pope and is considered by many historians to be the first pope in the full sense of that word. His tenure as pope lasted only fourteen years, yet he made enduring contributions to church doctrine, administration, Bible interpretation, preaching, church worship, missions, and pastoral care. Rightly is he known as Gregory “the Great.”

Gregory was born around 540 into a family that was prominent both politically (his father was a senator) and religiously (his grandfather was a pope). At age 34 he was appointed Prefect [chief official] of Rome but shortly thereafter resigned his office to dedicate his life to God. He sold his family’s property and directed the proceeds to aid the poor and to open seven monasteries, one of which he entered. Recognizing Gregory’s character and ability, the pope chose him to serve first as one of the seven deacons of Rome and then as papal representative to the Emperor in Constantinople. Around 585 he returned to the monastery of St. Andrew’s where he served as abbot for a short season. Then in 590 Pope Pelagius II succumbed to the plague, and Gregory was chosen unanimously to be his replacement. Gregory opposed the selection, but his plea to the Emperor was intercepted, and the people of Rome carried him bodily to St. Peter’s!

Gregory’s tenure as pope occurred during a time of instability. The Western Roman Empire had fallen in 476, and in the absence of effective leadership Gregory found himself negotiating treaties, managing lands, ransoming captives, and organizing relief for the poor. The only criticism his administration received was that his exceeding generosity emptied the coffers as quickly as his efficient management filled them.

But it was as chief shepherd of the Latin church that Gregory made his lasting contributions. He reformed church worship and established schools to train singers and musicians. He set, modeled, and enforced strict standards for the clergy. His popular preaching drew large crowds and set a pattern for preachers for years to come. He encouraged many men to become monks, sent missionaries to England, and supported the churches of Spain and France. He wrote a commentary on Job, sermons on Ezekiel and the Gospels, devotional biographies, and the most influential work on pastoral care in the history of the church. Even the historian Edward Gibbon, no friend of Christianity, commented, “The pontificate [papal rule] of Gregory the Great ... is one of the most edifying periods of the history of the church.”<sup>1</sup> Gregory died March 12, 604.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Methuen, 1911), 5:35.

## Overview

Gregory's *Pastoral Rule* is the most influential work on pastoral ministry in the history of the church. After it was written around 590 the Emperor ordered it to be immediately translated from Latin into Greek to distribute to every bishop in the Byzantine Empire. In the west, Charlemagne required every bishop in the Holy Roman Empire to study it, and it became traditional to give a copy of the book to new bishops at their ordination. As one biographer commented, "The maxims of Gregory have molded the Church. They have sensibly shaped the conduct and the policy of the Church's rulers, and ... have 'made the bishops who have made modern nations.'"<sup>2</sup>

This influential work originated as a letter from Gregory to the Bishop of Ravenna who had reproved him for his reluctance in accepting the office of pope. Gregory's response explained how the awesome responsibility of church leadership should give everyone pause before assuming it.<sup>3</sup>

With kind and humble intent you reprove me, dearest brother, for having wished by hiding myself to fly from the burdens of pastoral rule; as to which, lest to some they should appear light, I express with my pen in the book before you all my own estimate of their heaviness, in order both that he who is free from them may not unwarily seek them, and that he who has so sought them may tremble for having got them.

As it circulated it was known by two titles: *The Book of Pastoral Rule (Liber Regulae Pastoralis)* and *The Book of Pastoral Care (Liber Pastoralis Curae)*. Both titles communicate Gregory's understanding of the bishop's office: one charged by God with the care of His flock.

Gregory himself explained the structure of his work:

This book is divided into four separate heads of argument: (1) after what manner every one should come to supreme rule; and, (2) duly arriving at it, after what manner he should live; and, (3) living well, after what manner he should teach; and, (4) teaching aright, with how great consideration every day he should become aware of his own infirmity; lest either humility fly from the approach, or life be at variance with the arrival, or teaching be wanting to the life, or presumption unduly exalt the teaching.

Simply put, Gregory addresses a pastor's qualifications, life, ministry, and humility. A church leader's character and conduct, as well as his approach to ministry, are critical to the health of the church. Gregory's *Book of Pastoral Rule* offers Biblical, practical insight into each of these four areas so that God's pastors can more effectively shepherd the flock of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by F. H. Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought* (London: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1905), 1:239–240.

<sup>3</sup> The text for this summary is taken from Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, vol. 12, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1895), 1. This public domain version is hosted by the HathiTrust Digital Library ([hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org)).

## **PART I**

### **The Pastor's Qualifications**

Gregory opens with a precautionary word for would-be church leaders. To oversee Christ's church one must have competence, integrity, pure motives, and the ability to focus. Anyone lacking these virtues should avoid the pulpit and remain in the pew.

First, those lacking pastoral skills should not seek pastoral office. "No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intent meditation, learned it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskillful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts!" Intensive training is required of physicians of the body; how much more so for physicians of the soul! Spiritual leadership brings privileges that can make ministry attractive to the wrong people for the wrong reasons. However, God severely judges those who assume a religious role for which they are unqualified (Isaiah 56:11; Matthew 15:14). Therefore God's shepherds must be well-equipped to tend God's sheep.

Second, those who preach God's Word must practice what they preach. People listen with their eyes more than their ears, and a pastor's ungodly example endangers his sheep.

For indeed the shepherds drink most pure water, when with a right understanding they imbibe the streams of truth. But to foul the same water with their feet is to corrupt the studies of holy meditation by evil living. And verily the sheep drink the water fouled by their feet, when any of those subject to them follow not the words which they hear, but only imitate the bad examples which they see. Thirsting for the things said, but perverted by the works observed, they take in mud with their draughts, as from polluted fountains.

Jesus warned, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Those who do not apply Scripture should not teach Scripture.

Third, aspiring church leaders should be wary of wrong motives lest they "through lust of preeminence undertake a leadership of perdition [destruction]." Even Jesus refused to be made king when the crowd's motives were inappropriate (John 6:15).

Finally, pastors must be able to focus. "Often the care of government, when undertaken, distracts the heart in diverse directions; and one is found unequal to dealing with particular things, while with confused mind divided among many." Anxiety becomes a temptation, and a leader can neglect his own spiritual health. When the pastor does not care for himself, he cannot care for his flock.

Having discouraged unqualified individuals from seeking leadership, Gregory addresses qualified individuals who are reluctant to lead.

For there are some who are eminently [greatly] endowed with virtues, and for the training of others are exalted by great gifts, who are pure in zeal for chastity, strong in the might of abstinence, filled with the feasts of doctrine, humble in the long-suffering of patience, erect in the fortitude [power] of authority, tender in the grace of loving-kindness, strict in the severity of justice. Truly such as these, if when called they refuse to undertake offices of supreme rule, for the most part deprive themselves of the very gifts which they received not for themselves alone, but for others also.

Such men hide God's light under a bushel (Matthew 5:15). They refuse to feed Christ's sheep and thereby reveal that they do not truly love the Shepherd.

Some who decline public service will be judged "guilty in proportion to the greatness of the gifts whereby they might have been publicly useful. For with what disposition [frame] of mind does one who might be conspicuous in profiting his neighbors prefer his own privacy to the advantage of others, when the only begotten of the supreme Father Himself came forth from the bosom of the Father into the midst of us all, that He might profit many?" For others, however, to decline leadership to make way for someone more qualified is the right thing to do.

Regarding the actual call to church leadership, God summons some leaders through inclination and others through a command. Thus Isaiah volunteered (Isaiah 6:8) while Jeremiah protested (Jeremiah 1:6). "But this in both cases is to be nicely observed, that he who refused did not persist in his refusal, and he who wished to be sent saw himself previously cleansed by a coal of the altar." Isaiah dared not go without first being cleansed by God, and Jeremiah dared not refuse once God's will was confirmed.

However the call comes, a potential church leader must be wary of his motives. Scripture states that, "If a man desire the office of a bishop [overseer], he desireth a good work," but the requirements for service are severe, for "a bishop then must be blameless" (1 Timothy 3:1, 2). Pride and worldliness are temptations that no leader can dismiss lightly. Moreover, the heart is so deceitful that motives that appear pure can in fact be tainted. The best barometer of one's character is one's past behavior, for actions convey more than intentions.

Who, then, should consider becoming an overseer in Christ's church?

That man, therefore, ought by all means to be drawn with cords to be an example of good living who already lives spiritually, dying to all passions of the flesh; who disregards worldly prosperity; who is afraid of no adversity; who desires only inward wealth; whose intention the body, in good accord with it, thwarts not at all by its frailness, nor the spirit greatly by its disdain: one who is not led to covet the things of others, but gives freely of his own; who through the bowels of compassion is quickly moved to pardon, yet is never bent down from the fortress of rectitude [uprightness] by pardoning more than is meet; who perpetrates [commits] no unlawful deeds, yet deplors those perpetrated by others as though they were his own; who out of affection of heart sympathizes with another's infirmity, and so rejoices in the good of his neighbor as though it were his own advantage; who so insinuates himself as an example to others in all he does that among them he has nothing, at any rate of his own past deeds, to blush for; who studies so to live that he may be able to water even dry hearts with the streams of doctrine; who has already learned by the use and trial of prayer that he can obtain what he has requested from the Lord.

Those who oversee the church must walk rightly with God because they lead by example. "Wherefore let every one measure himself wisely, lest he venture to assume a place of rule, while in himself vice still reigns unto condemnation; lest one whom his own guilt depraves desire to become an intercessor for the faults of others." Like Old Testament priests, pastors must teach by both word and by deed "the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezekiel 44:23).



## **PART II**

### **The Pastor's Life**

Having described the qualifications a pastor must have, Gregory now describes the life he must lead.

The conduct of a prelate [church leader] ought so far to transcend the conduct of the people, as the life of a shepherd is wont to exalt him above the flock. For one whose estimation is such that the people are called his flock is bound anxiously to consider what great necessity is laid upon him to maintain rectitude [uprightness]. It is necessary, then, that in thought he should be pure, in action chief; discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech; a near neighbor to every one in sympathy, exalted above all in contemplation; a familiar friend of good livers through humility, unbending against the vices of evil-doers through zeal for righteousness; not relaxing in his care for what is inward from being occupied in outward things, nor neglecting to provide for outward things in his solicitude [concern] for what is inward.

Higher authority carries higher standards of conduct. Therefore the remainder of Part II provides brief explanations and encouragements for nine character requirements of a pastor.

1. *Pure of Mind.* "The ruler should always be pure in thought, inasmuch as no impurity ought to pollute him who has undertaken the office of wiping away the stains of pollution in the hearts of others also; for the hand that would cleanse from dirt must ... be clean, lest, being itself sordid with clinging mire, it soil whatever it touches all the more." Like Israel's priests who had to be clean to carry God's holy things, so church leaders must maintain a clean mind, "guarding it against being either lifted up by presumption of spirit, or defiled by delight of the flesh, or obscured by importunity [insistence] of dusty thought through lust for earthly things." As the prophet cautioned, "be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD" (Isaiah 52:11).
2. *An Example in Conduct.* "The ruler should always be chief in action, that by his living he may point out the way of life to those who are put under him, and that the flock, which follows the voice and manners of the shepherd, may learn how to walk better through example than through words. For he who is required by the necessity of his position to speak the highest things is compelled by the same necessity to exhibit the highest things." Consistency between life and doctrine pleases God and validates the message being preached.
3. *Wise in Speech.* "The ruler should be discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech; lest he either utter what ought to be suppressed or suppress what he ought to utter." Pastors must speak judiciously, but they cannot refrain from error by refraining from speech. Preachers are heralds who must proclaim God's truth. "For, as incautious speaking leads into error, so indiscreet silence leaves in error those who might have been instructed. For often improvident [short-sighted] rulers, fearing to lose human favor, shrink timidly from speaking freely the things that are right." Pastors who are silent out of fear are like hired shepherds who flee from danger and leave the flock unguarded (John 10:12).
4. *Near and Far, with Mercy and Meditation.* "The ruler should be a near neighbor to every one in sympathy, and exalted above all in contemplation, so that through the bowels of loving-kindness he may transfer the infirmities of others to himself, and by loftiness of speculation transcend even himself in his aspiration after the invisible; lest either in seeking high things he despise the weak things of his neighbors, or in suiting himself to the weak things of his neighbors he relinquish his aspiration after high things."



A pastor should be near his people as a shepherd is near his sheep and a physician is near his patients. However, the pastor must also regularly remove himself from his people to spend time with God. Leaders must find a rhythm between ministering to their people and taking time to read, reflect, and pray.

5. *For and Against, with Truth and Love.* “The ruler should be, through humility, a companion of good livers, and, through the zeal of righteousness, rigid against the vices of evil-doers; so that in nothing he prefer himself to the good, and yet, when the fault of the bad requires it, he be at once conscious of the power of his priority; to the end that, while among his subordinates who live well he waives his rank and accounts them as his equals, he may not fear to execute the laws of rectitude [virtue] towards the perverse.” God gives His stewards authority in His household, and they must exercise this authority humbly and moderately. The goal is that “he who is at the head may both soothe the hearts of his subjects in making them afraid, and yet in soothing them constrain them to reverential awe.”
6. *Balancing Internals and Externals.* “The ruler should not relax his care for the things that are within, in his occupation among the things that are without, nor neglect to provide for the things that are without in his solicitude [concern] for the things that are within.” Pastors must care both for their congregants’ physical and spiritual well-being.
7. *Loving People, Not Applause.* “It is right for good rulers to desire to please men; but this in order to draw their neighbors by the sweetness of their own character to affection for the truth; not that they should long to be themselves loved, but should make affection for themselves as a sort of road by which to lead the hearts of their hearers to the love of the Creator.” Pastors struggle with pleasing men. This can lead to their being soft on sin, lest they offend the sinner, or harsh and domineering, lest they be challenged or criticized. A worthy pastor desires the love of his congregation not for his own sake but for God’s.
8. *Distinguishing Virtue and Vice.* “The ruler also ought to understand how commonly vices pass themselves off as virtues.” The devil can make evil seem good and good seem evil, so the pastor must be discerning and look beyond appearances.
9. *Prudent in Dealing with Sin.* “Things, even though openly known, ought sometimes to be seasonably tolerated, but sometimes, though hidden, be closely investigated; that they ought sometimes to be gently reproofed, but sometimes vehemently censured.” Gregory highlights the need for discernment and wisdom when dealing with people and the sins that entangle them. Not every person or situation deserves the same response.

Gregory concludes by urging church leaders to stay in God’s Word. “But all this is duly executed by a ruler, if, inspired by the spirit of heavenly fear and love, he meditate daily on the precepts of the Holy Bible, that the words of divine admonition [warning] may restore in him the power of solicitude [concern] and of provident circumspection [prudent caution] with regard to the celestial [heavenly] life.”

## **Part III**

### **The Pastor's Ministry**

Having discussed the pastor's qualifications and life, Gregory now turns to the pastor's work. Gregory's key insight is that a shepherd cannot tend all sheep alike because different sheep require different care.

For the things that profit some often hurt others; seeing that also for the most part herbs which nourish some animals are fatal to others; and the gentle hissing that quiets horses incites whelps; and the medicine which abates one disease aggravates another; and the bread which invigorates the life of the strong kills little children. Therefore according to the quality of the hearers ought the discourse of teachers to be fashioned, so as to suit all and each for their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification.... Whence every teacher also, that he may edify all in the one virtue of charity, ought to touch the hearts of his hearers out of one doctrine, but not with one and the same exhortation [instruction].

Physicians do not treat all patients alike. Parents do not raise all children alike. Likewise, pastors should not admonish all church members alike. (Throughout Part III, Gregory uses the word "admonish" to mean "to teach and encourage obedience to God's Word.")

Gregory considers thirty-five different groups of church members. The full list is provided in the appendix of this book summary, but the following sample illustrates how a more personal ministry is a more effective ministry.

Differently, then, to be admonished are men and women; because on the former heavier injunctions [requirements], on the latter lighter are to be laid, that those may be exercised by great things, but these winningly converted by light ones.

Differently to be admonished are young men and old; because for the most part severity of admonition directs the former to improvement, while kind remonstrance [correction] disposes the latter to better deeds. For it is written, "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father" (1 Timothy 5:1).

Differently to be admonished are the poor and the rich: for to the former we ought to offer the solace of comfort against tribulation, but in the latter to induce fear as against elation.

Differently to be admonished are the whole and the sick. For the whole are to be admonished that they employ the health of the body to the health of the soul.... But, on the other hand, the sick are to be admonished that they feel themselves to be sons of God in that the scourge of discipline chastises them.

Differently to be admonished are the obstinate and the fickle. The former are to be told that they think more of themselves than they are, and therefore do not acquiesce in the counsels of others: but the latter are to be given to understand that they undervalue and disregard themselves too much, and so are turned aside from their own judgment in successive moments of time.

Even though church members differ, pastors must preach to their churches as a whole. As challenging as it is to minister one on one, “it is yet far more difficult to admonish innumerable [countless] hearers laboring under various passions at one and the same time with one common exhortation [instruction].” In reflecting upon this difficulty, Gregory gives the following counsel:

For in this case the speech is to be tempered with such art that, the vices of the hearers being diverse, it may be found suitable to them severally, and yet be not diverse from itself; that it pass indeed with one stroke through the midst of passions, but, after the manner of a two-edged sword, cut the swellings of carnal thoughts on either side; so that humility be so preached to the proud that yet fear be not increased in the timid.... Good things are so to be preached that ill things be not assisted sideways. The highest good is so to be praised that the lowest be not despaired of. The lowest is so to be cherished that there be no cessation [end] of striving for the highest from the lowest being thought sufficient.

Gregory suggests sermons should both comfort the suffering and challenge those who are overly comfortable. He echoes Paul who said to “warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Extremes exist not just within churches but within church members. The same individual can struggle with laziness one day and overwork the next. Therefore in treating one temptation, pastors must be careful not to aggravate another. “If, then, medicine for the body administered without division can be of service in a divided way, why should not medicine for the soul, applied in one and the same preaching, be of power to meet moral diseases in diverse directions?”

Like physicians, pastors must prioritize serious ailments over minor conditions. Not all vices can be confronted at once, so “the preacher must be content by skillful management in his exhortation [encouragement] to suffer one to increase, to the end that he may keep the other back from causing the death which is imminent.” In such instances, asks Gregory, “Which plague then should be the more ardently [forcefully] attacked but that which presses on the man the more dangerously?”

Pastors must teach God’s truths at the appropriate depth and at the appropriate time. Some are ready for the deep things of God whereas others need more basic teachings. “But the preacher should know how to avoid drawing the mind of his hearer beyond its strength, lest, so to speak, the string of the soul, when stretched more than it can bear, should be broken.” Thus, spiritual babes need milk before they are ready for meat (1 Corinthians 3:1–2; Hebrews 5:13–14). This is another application of Gregory’s principle of distinction—church leaders must be discerning in how they minister God’s Word to God’s people.

Gregory closes Part III by turning his attention once again to the minister’s life. Pastors must model their message, and preachers must practice what they preach. “But in the midst of these things we are brought back by the earnest desire of charity to what we have already said above; that every preacher should give forth a sound more by his deeds than by his words, and rather by good living imprint footsteps for men to follow than by speaking show them the way to walk in.” Teachers of God’s Word must remember that “before they give voice to words of exhortation [calls to obedience], they should proclaim in their deeds all that they are about to speak.”

## **Part IV**

### **The Pastor's Humility**

Gregory addresses the pastor's qualifications (Part I), life (Part II), and ministry (Part III) so that pastors might have more fruitful ministries. However, success can foster pride, so Gregory concludes his work with an exhortation [call] for humility.

But since often, when preaching is abundantly poured forth in fitting ways, the mind of the speaker is elevated in itself by a hidden delight in self-display, great care is needed that he may gnaw himself with the laceration [rough tear] of fear, lest he who recalls the diseases of others to health by remedies should himself swell through neglect of his own health; lest in helping others he desert himself, lest in lifting up others he fall. For to some the greatness of their virtue has often been the occasion of their perdition [destruction]; causing them, while inordinately [overly] secure in confidence of strength, to die unexpectedly through negligence.

Pride ravages the soul, silently and secretly feeding upon good virtues as it spreads. Therefore, God keeps His pastors humble through frail bodies, troubled relationships, and ministerial discouragements. God employs such thorns in the flesh to keep His ministers from exalting themselves (2 Corinthians 12:7).

For the same reason, God also permits personal imperfections to remain in His ministers. Though frustrating, persistent flaws and limitations provide enduring reminders of one's weakness and sinfulness and therefore one's entire reliance and dependence upon God.

Whence it is needful that, when abundance of virtues flatters us, the eye of the soul should return to its own weaknesses, and salubriously [healthfully] depress itself; that it should look, not at the right things that it has done, but those that it has left undone; so that, while the heart is bruised by recollection of infirmity, it may be the more strongly confirmed in virtue before the author of humility. For it is generally for this purpose that Almighty God, though perfecting in great part the minds of rulers, still in some small part leaves them imperfect; in order that, when they shine with wonderful virtues, they may pine with disgust at their own imperfection, and by no means lift themselves up for great things, while still laboring in their struggle against the least; but that, since they are not strong enough to overcome in what is last and lowest, they may not dare to glory in their chief performances.

Personal weakness should produce divine dependence, suffering should quench pride, and inability should prompt pastors to minister not from their strength but from God's. As Paul writes:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

Gregory humbly concludes his work with a request for prayer:

See now, good man, how, compelled by the necessity laid upon me by thy reproof, being intent on showing what a pastor ought to be, I have been as an ill-favored painter portraying a handsome man; and how I direct others to the shore of perfection, while myself still tossed among the waves of transgressions [sins]. But in the shipwreck of this present life sustain me, I beseech thee, by the plank of thy prayer, that, since my own weight sinks me down, the hand of thy merit may raise me up.

## **Appraisal**

The Bible issues numerous cautions for those who assume leadership roles in the body of Christ. God's teachers "will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1, ESV). Church leaders "will have to give an account" (Hebrews 13:17, ESV). Jesus warned that "whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19, ESV). Yet God's standards for church office must not deter qualified men from church leadership, for "if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1, ESV). Certain men must serve as pastors, even though they will shoulder a heavy responsibility that requires higher standards and incurs stricter judgment. So who should pastor, and how should God's shepherds exercise care of God's flock?

Gregory the Great's *Book of Pastoral Rule* provides sound responses to these critical questions. His assessment of the pastor's qualifications, life, ministry, and humility have shaped God's servants for centuries. His assessments and directions are Biblical, blunt, practical, and proven. Although written in a different era, his sober cautions and wise counsel have remained relevant in every age and setting. Even though his allegorical approach to certain Scriptures will be unfamiliar to some, they in no way undermine his keen observations and applications. Pastors will need to bring a robust grasp of the gospel to their reading since Gregory assumes rather than explains it in his writing. Nonetheless, Gregory's *Book of Pastoral Rule* is an invaluable handbook to the qualifications, life, ministry, and humility of a pastor that is desperately needed in Christ's church today. May God continue to use the practical reflections of this faithful pastor to help pastors more faithfully shepherd the flock of God.

## **Connection to Be United in Christ**

For unity to exist in the church, the church must have leaders who are humble, holy, and deeply rooted in the Word of God. They must teach, counsel, and live the Bible if they are to teach it in transforming ways. Unless the life and ministry of a pastor are founded on God's Word, both he and his church will shake and split when struck by the winds and quakes of this world. Members of the church will naturally divide when left to their own wisdom and strength. The body of Christ will inevitably fall apart.

To be unified churches must select qualified pastors, men with the right skills, motives, and character. These pastors must live lives worthy of their calling—pure of mind, holy in life, discreet in speech, humble of heart—and must balance both personal life and public ministry. Pastors must apply God's Word differently to the different members of their flock, and by God's grace they must remain humble lest pride compromise progress. If God's overseers will steward God's household well, then God's children will better be able to Be United in Christ.

### **Key Quotations**

“For there are some who are eminently [greatly] endowed with virtues, and for the training of others are exalted by great gifts, who are pure in zeal for chastity, strong in the might of abstinence, filled with the feasts of doctrine, humble in the long-suffering of patience, erect in the fortitude [power] of authority, tender in the grace of loving-kindness, strict in the severity of justice. Truly such as these, if when called they refuse to undertake offices of supreme rule, for the most part deprive themselves of the very gifts which they received not for themselves alone, but for others also.” (4)

“For the mind itself lies to itself about itself, and feigns [pretends] with respect to good work to love what it does not love, and with respect to the world’s glory not to love what it does love.” (6)

“Wherefore let every one measure himself wisely, lest he venture to assume a place of rule, while in himself vice still reigns unto condemnation; lest one whom his own guilt depraves desire to become an intercessor for the faults of others.” (7)

“The conduct of a prelate [church leader] ought so far to transcend the conduct of the people as the life of a shepherd is wont to exalt him above the flock. For one whose estimation is such that the people are called his flock is bound anxiously to consider what great necessity is laid upon him to maintain rectitude [uprightness]. It is necessary, then, that in thought he should be pure, in action chief; discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech; a near neighbor to every one in sympathy, exalted above all in contemplation; a familiar friend of good lives through humility, unbending against the vices of evil-doers through zeal for righteousness; not relaxing in his care for what is inward from being occupied in outward things, nor neglecting to provide for outward things in his solicitude [concern] for what is inward.” (9)

“But in the midst of these things we are brought back by the earnest desire of charity to what we have already said above; that every preacher should give forth a sound more by his deeds than by his words, and rather by good living imprint footsteps for men to follow than by speaking show them the way to walk in.” (71)

“For to some the greatness of their virtue has often been the occasion of their perdition [destruction]; causing them, while inordinately [excessively] secure in confidence of strength, to die unexpectedly through negligence.” (71)

“But since often, when preaching is abundantly poured forth in fitting ways, the mind of the speaker is elevated in itself by a hidden delight in self-display, great care is needed that he may gnaw himself with the laceration [rough tear] of fear, lest he who recalls the diseases of others to health by remedies should himself swell through neglect of his own health; lest in helping others he desert himself, lest in lifting up others he fall.” (71)

“When they shine with wonderful virtues, they may pine with disgust at their own imperfection, and by no means lift themselves up for great things, while still laboring in their struggle against the least; but that, since they are not strong enough to overcome in what is last and lowest, they may not dare to glory in their chief performances.” (72)

“See now, good man, how, compelled by the necessity laid upon me by thy reproof, being intent on showing what a pastor ought to be, I have been as an ill-favored painter portraying a handsome man; and how I direct others to the shore of perfection, while myself still tossed among the waves of transgressions [sins]. But in the shipwreck of this present life sustain me, I beseech thee, by the plank of thy prayer, that, since my own weight sinks me down, the hand of thy merit may raise me up.” (72)

### **Key Bible Passages (ESV)**

“For though the LORD is high, He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar.” (**Psalms 138:6**)

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.” (**Isaiah 52:11**)

“Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?” (**Ezekiel 34:18–19**)

“For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” (**Malachi 2:7**)

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (**Matthew 5:14–16**)

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (**Matthew 5:19**)

“Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.” (**Luke 22:26**)

“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (**Acts 6:4**)

“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.” (**Acts 20:28**)

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (**1 Corinthians 4:1–2**)

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” (**1 Timothy 3:1–2**)

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (**2 Timothy 4:1–2**)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (**Hebrews 13:17**)

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (**James 3:1**)

“So I exhort [direct] the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (**1 Peter 5:1–3**)



## **Appendix – Gregory’s Different Groups of Church Members**

“One and the same exhortation [instruction] does not suit all, inasmuch as neither are all bound together by similarity of character. For the things that profit some often hurt others; seeing that also for the most part herbs which nourish some animals are fatal to others; and the gentle hissing that quiets horses incites whelps; and the medicine which abates one disease aggravates another; and the bread which invigorates [energizes] the life of the strong kills little children. Therefore according to the quality of the hearers ought the discourse [message] of teachers to be fashioned, so as to suit all and each for their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification. Whence every teacher also, that he may edify all in the one virtue of charity, ought to touch the hearts of his hearers out of one doctrine, but not with one and the same exhortation [instruction].... Differently to be admonished [taught and encouraged to obey] are these that follow.”

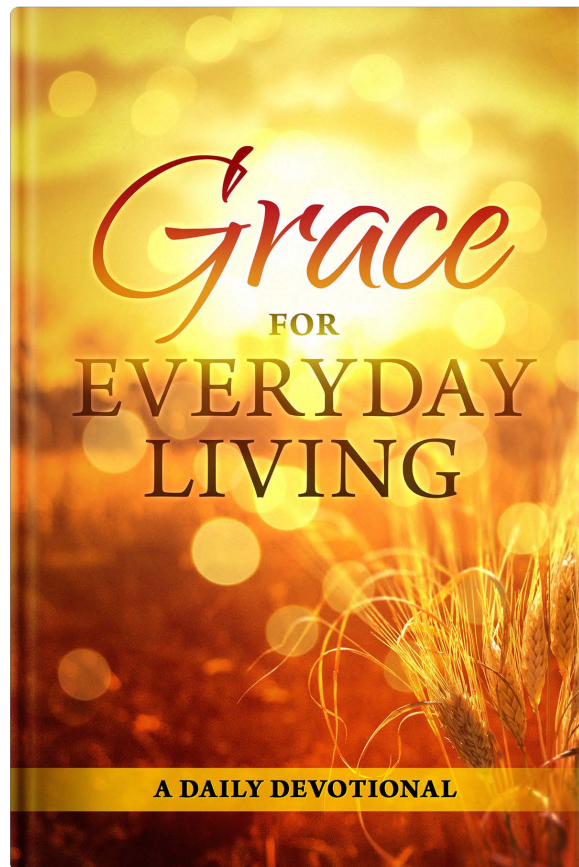
1. Men and women.
2. The poor and the rich.
3. The joyful and the sad.
4. Superiors and subordinates.
5. Servants and masters.
6. The informed and the uninformed.
7. The impudent [arrogant] and the bashful.
8. The forward and the fainthearted.
9. The impatient and the patient.
10. The kindly disposed and the envious.
11. The sincere and the insincere.
12. The whole and the sick.
13. The innocent and the hardened.
14. The quiet and the talkative.
15. The slothful and the hasty.
16. The meek and the passionate.
17. The humble and the haughty.
18. The obstinate and the fickle.
19. The gluttonous and the abstinent.

20. The generous and the greedy.
21. The possessive and the acquisitive.
22. The quarrelsome and the peaceable.
23. The divisive and the peacemakers.
24. The ignorant and the knowledgeable.
25. Those too hesitant to preach and those too eager.
26. The successful and the failures.
27. The married and the single.
28. Non-virgins and virgins.
29. Those who deplore sins of deed, and those who deplore sins of thought.
30. Those who lament but do not forsake sin, and those who forsake but do not lament sin.
31. Those who boast of their sin and those who denounce wrong yet do not guard against it.
32. Those who sin impulsively and those who sin willfully.
33. Those who commit small sins frequently and those who commit large sins occasionally.
34. Those who do not begin what is good, and those who fail to complete the good begun.
35. Those who do evil secretly and good publicly; and those who conceal the good they do, and yet in some things done publicly allow evil to be thought of them.

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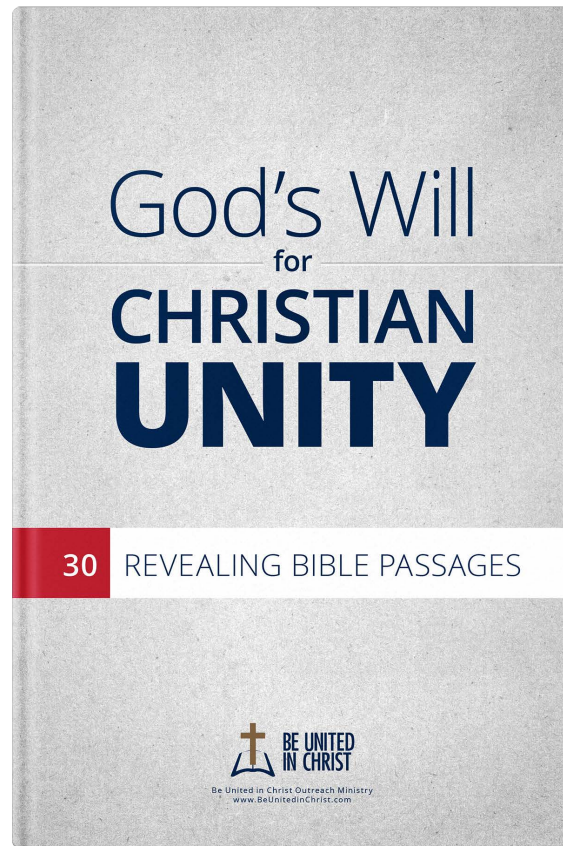
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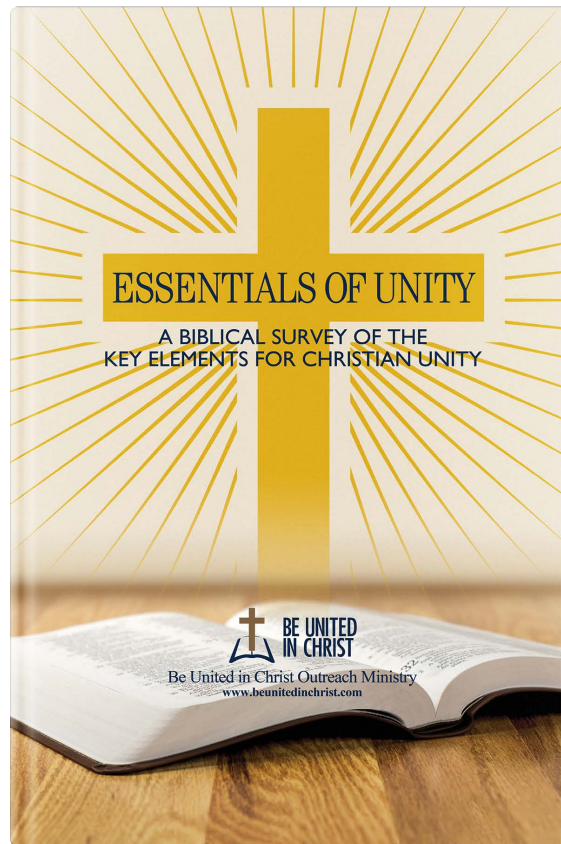
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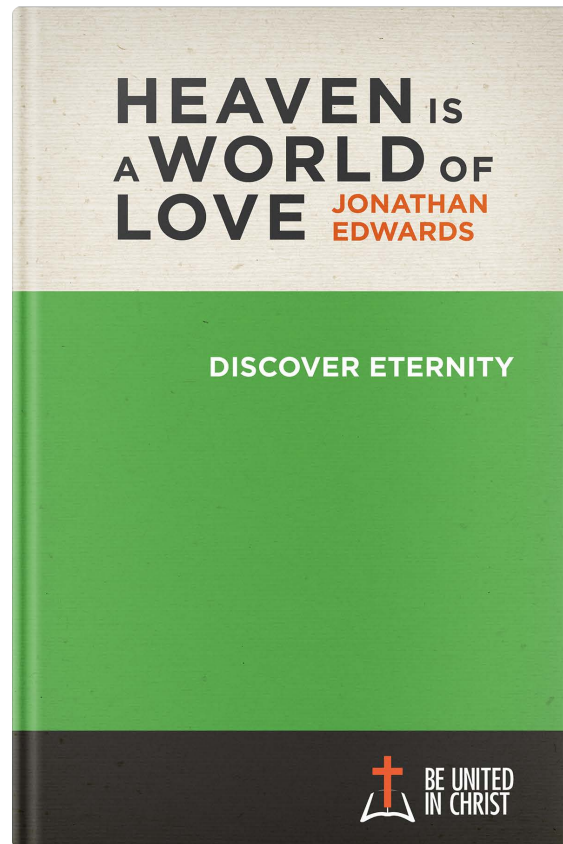
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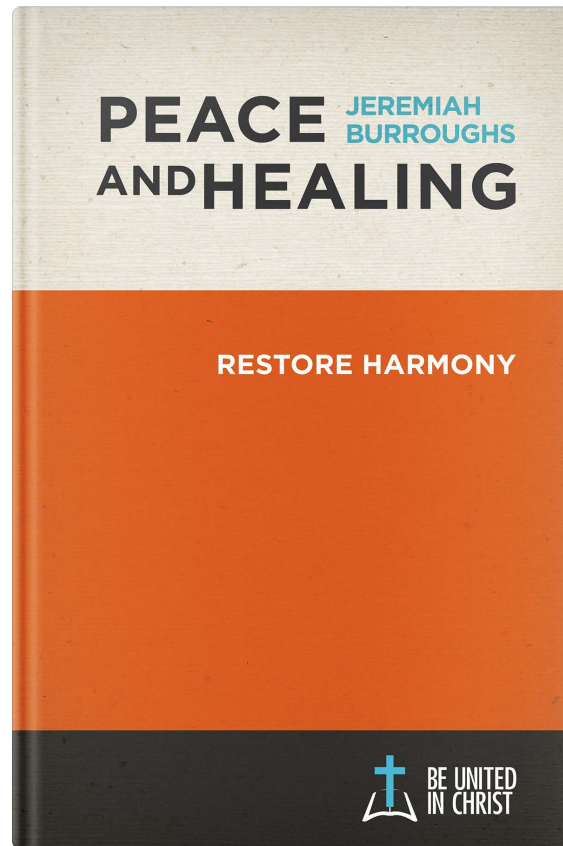
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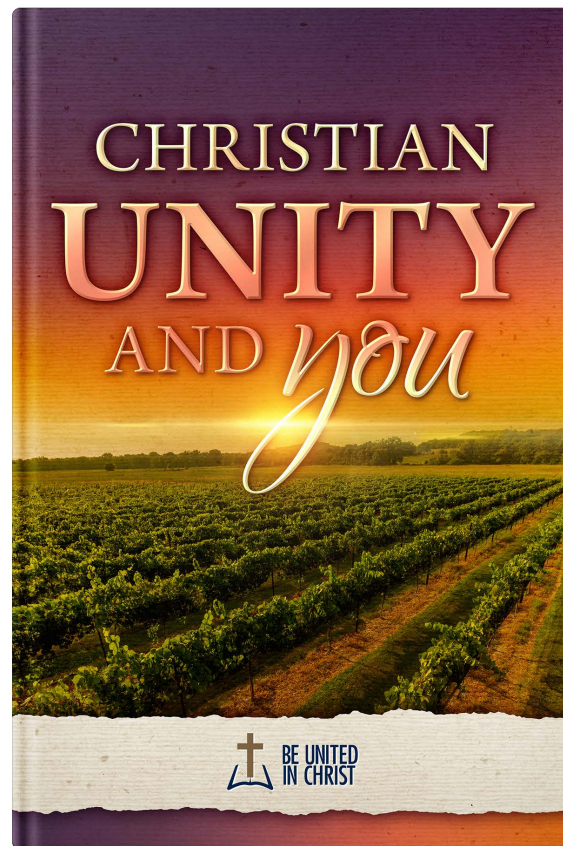


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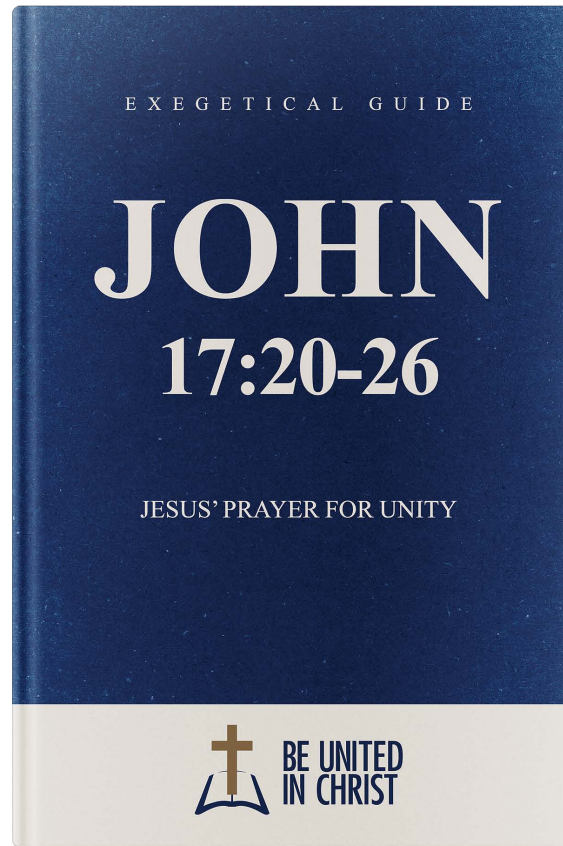
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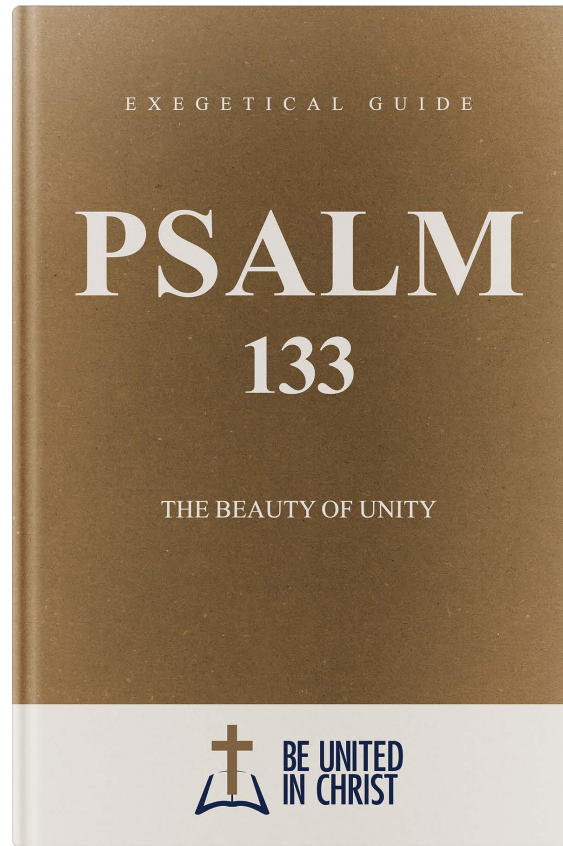


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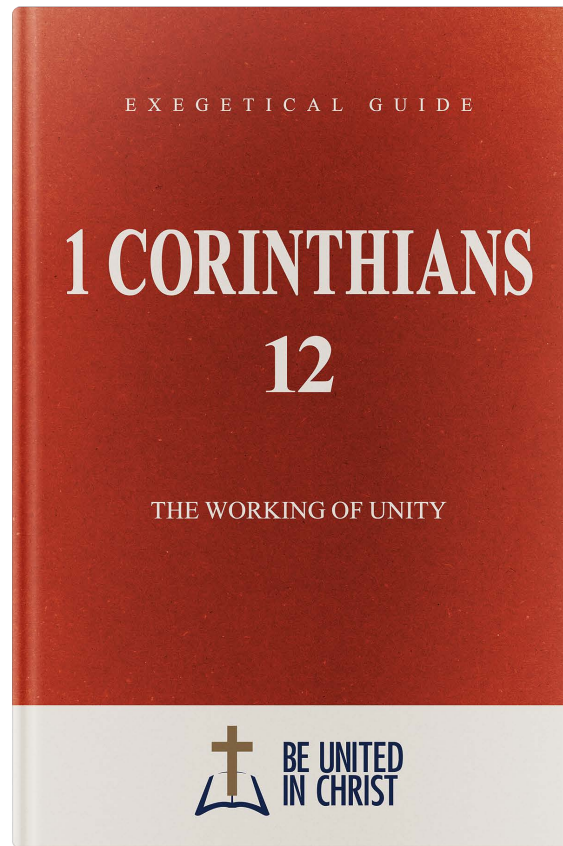


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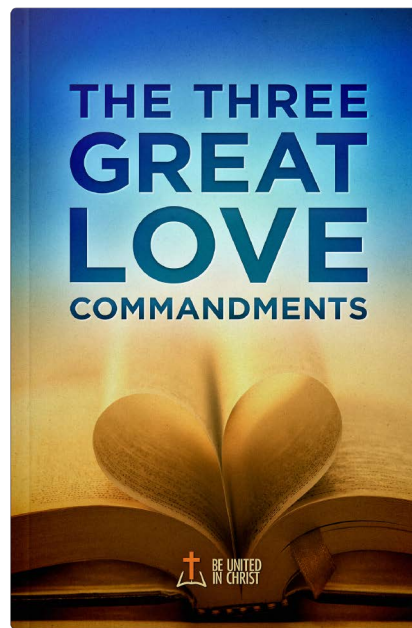
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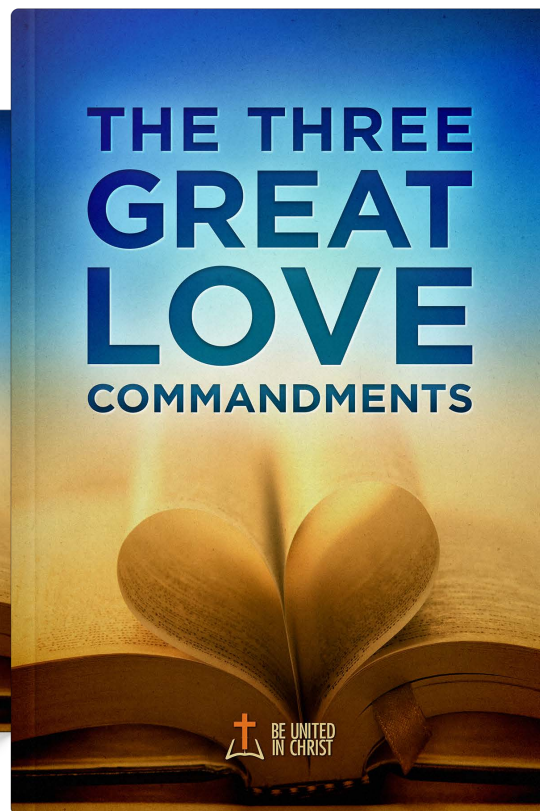
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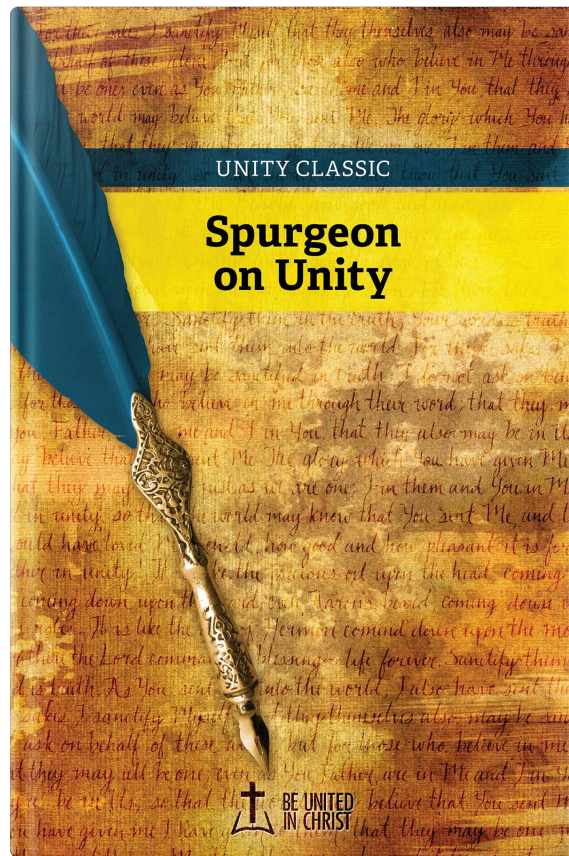


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