

11 Reasons Pastors Are Trusted Less Today

A day does not pass that I do not hear from a hurting pastor. Serving in that role has to be one of the most challenging vocations today.

Sure, there are some bad and immoral pastors. But the vast majority of our pastors serve their congregations in a way that honors God and makes a difference in the community.

But both anecdotally and by objective research, we learn that pastors are trusted less and held in lower esteem each year. A recent Pew Research poll found that the favorable view of clergy had declined to 37 percent of those surveyed.

Why are pastors no longer held in high esteem? What is behind the precipitous drop in favorable ratings almost every year? Allow me to offer 11 possible reasons. As you will see, they are not mutually exclusive.

1. The moral failures of a minority of pastors receive widespread coverage. The media loves the sensational stories behind clergy failure. For sure, some stories such as sex abuse should be brought into the public eye. But many people now believe the bad behavior of a few is normative for all pastors.

2. Our nation has marginalized the Christian faith. So it should not be unexpected that leaders in the Christian world are viewed more negatively.

3. Pastoral tenure has dropped significantly over the past few decades. Tenure is up slightly the past few years, but the longer trend is down. Trust is built over several years, not two or three years. Fewer pastors have made it to the point of several years.

4. Some church members have a strong entitlement mentality. They see the local congregation as a place largely to meet their needs and desires, rather than to serve and give. If those needs and desires are not met, the pastor is often the locus of blame.

5. Social media encourages criticism from a distance. There is much commendable about social media. Indeed, I am heavy user of it. But it also is a means for critics to sound off about pastors (and others) without forethought or consequences.

6. A few pastors have poor work ethics. More pastors are just the opposite; they fight workaholism. But the few pastors who are lazy and have little accountability hurt the perceptions people have of other pastors.

7. Pastors are often the scapegoats for fear and change. It is cliché to say the world is changing rapidly. Many church members would like their churches to remain the same every year. Such a reality is not possible, and the pastor is often the scapegoat for the discomfort that comes with change.

8. There is a pervasive cynicism in our society. The reasons behind that reality are many. But congregations and their leaders are not immune from this widespread and pervasive cynicism on society that seems to be growing.

9. There is a failure of some pastors in two key areas: leadership and emotional intelligence. Some pastors are well prepared biblically and theologically. But some have not been taught leadership and healthy interpersonal skills.

10. There are higher expectations today for pastors to be competent, even dynamic, leaders. But as I noted in the previous point, some pastors have no preparation to be leaders of churches.

11. More churches are dying in America today. I estimate as many as 100,000 churches in America are dying. Many will close

their doors in the next few years. Many of the pastors of these churches are blamed for this malady.

I love pastors. Most pastors are wonderful servants of God, yet their plights are often very difficult.

What do you think of these 11 reasons? What would you add?

And allow me one footnote: Please pray for your pastor.

Thom S. Rainer *is president of LifeWay Christian Resources. For the original article, visit .*