

Session 5

The Cross Marks the Minister

Colossians 1:24-29

September 23, 2023

Let's take a moment and open in a word of prayer this morning. Our Father, we thank you for your holiness, and we thank you for this great gospel, that we have heard the proclamation of so faithfully through this weekend. We thank you for the gospel that saves us. We thank you for the Christ whom you sent to redeem us from our sins, to satisfy the demands of your perfect justice. It is death on the cross, the one who fulfilled your perfect righteousness, for each and every one of us.

We thank you that you, by the Spirit, have united us to him; that you've declared us righteous before you. We stand before you perfect, complete, accepted in the beloved; and we plead now for the gift, the power of the Holy Spirit, both to help me, but also to help every single person listening, to understand, discern, and learn, that their minds would be renewed, their lives would be changed through the word. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

For my final session, I'd like you to turn to Colossians 1 and verse 24. Colossians 1, verse 24 and following. We're going to see how we can identify a true minister of the gospel. How to discern the marks of the cross on a gospel minister. The message of Christ and him crucified is the power of God. It is the wisdom of God. And that power of God is real. It changes a person from the inside out.

Anyone in Christ is a new creation, right? The wisdom of God is effectual. It instructs the mind. It feeds new affections, new desires, because there's a new nature, and that new nature needs food, and that food is the word of God. It's the message of the cross, the word of the cross. And that wisdom feeds those new affections, feeds those new desires, informs the will, and sets the life in an entirely new direction.

So can you see the evidence of the power of God and the wisdom of God in a church, in its people, and most notably in its ministers? I'm not talking about what the world can see and know, things that the world can discern. We're not really concerned with what the world, how the world judges us.

The natural man does not accept the things of the spirit of God. First Corinthians 2:14, "But they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they're spiritually discerned." So, we understand when the world doesn't get us. "The reason why the world does not know us," First John 3:1, "is that the world did not know him." So, if they got him wrong, well, then they're going to get us wrong, too.

So, when I'm talking about the ability to see, and detect the evidences of the power of God, and the wisdom of God in a church, and its people, and its ministers, I'm talking about spiritual people; being able to see and detect. Spiritual people, being able to discern true Christians. And they are to look for the marks of the cross in a church, in its people, and in its ministers. Because the cross leaves distinct marks on a people.

Used to be that you could tell good from bad by looking at a church's doctrinal statement. But today, using copy and paste, really bad churches post decent doctrinal statements on their websites, but they don't practice those doctrinal statements.

They don't live consistently with what the doctrine that they post on their websites proclaims. Stephen Verdict's Elevation Church. Andy Stanley's North Point Church. I checked their doctrinal statements just recently. Decent doctrinal statements. Total departure in the how, in how they practice, how they preach.

Used to be that you could tell the difference between a good and bad pastor by whether or not he was a biblical expositor, preaching expository sermons. These days it seems like every pastor claims to be a biblical expositor, and I attribute that the popularity, of expository preaching or claiming to be an expository preacher, to the influence of faithful expositors like John MacArthur.

His example is so clear, and so known, and so appreciated, that now everybody wants to call themselves an expositor. But not every self-attesting expositor is a true expositor of Scripture. Just because a pastor moves consecutively through texts, it doesn't mean that he has derived his points from the exegetical study of the text, or that he is governed by sound hermeneutical principles, or that he has followed the context

and he is serving the author of Scriptures points rather than making his own points.

So when you look for a church, you've got to check the doctrinal statement. Yeah, that's a start. You got to, you got to, find an expository ministry. True expository preaching drives the listener to the verdict that's called for by the text, and demands repentance and change. You got to find true gospel preaching, as Don taught us to look for last night. It's a good doctrine. Yeah, clear, biblical, penetrating preaching; that's a must.

As they say, soft preaching makes hard hearts, and hard preaching makes soft hearts. So we're going to assume doctrinal theological, fidelity are prerequisites when looking for a sound church, sound minister's gospel. Same thing goes for expository preaching. But are there other marks we should look for? Are there other things we should look for in a church? In its people? In its ministers?

Well, let's look at the text, Colossians 1, and find out, starting in verse 24. Paul says this, "Now I rejoice in my

sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his Saints.

"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. To this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of" of, "full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

"I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the truth, just as you were taught, abounding in Thanksgiving."

So much to see there. Obviously, so many truths that are worth emphasizing, and, clearly, we're not going to be able to get to engage the text, as thoroughly as we might like to, in the conference format like this. But I do hope to draw out, from Paul's example, a few ways that the cross marks the true minister of Christ. And my hope, my prayer is that you will be able to discern good ministers from bad ones. That you will be able to identify faithful shepherds and differentiate them from unfaithful ones.

I'm praying that God will give you clarity, He'll give you discernment, so that, you can put yourself, your family, your loved ones, your friends, people near and far; that you'll be able to guide them to a shepherding ministry that is consistent

with the word of the Cross; where it's ministers bear the marks of the cross, in their life and ministry.

And even more than that, beyond that, I, I, hope that you will pattern yourself and your ministry, your own ministry, after good ministers of the cross. That you will imitate them, just as they imitate Paul, who himself had imitated Christ, First Corinthians 11:1.

So I've got five of these, five ways that the cross marks the minister. Here's mark number one, mark number one: Suffering joyfully. Suffering joyfully. Look at verse 24, again. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I'm filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church."

So, there it is, the first mark, suffering joyfully. Which means, we need to start by asking, does this minister that I'm observing, does he suffer at all or does he seem to have a pretty easy life as a pastor? Does he seem to get along with everybody? Does everyone say good things about him? Seems that the top qualification for many churches, that they have, for

their pastor, is that he's a nice guy, he's non-offensive, he gets along with everyone; he's winsome, handsome, well dressed, drives a good car, lives in a nice house in suburbia.

But Jesus said, "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you," Luke 6:26, "for so their fathers did the false prophets." According to Jesus, if your church is all about hiring a nice guy to be the pastor, one who never has a conflict, one who never engages conflict, well, woe to him and woe to you. That is not a faithful qualification for a true minister of the gospel.

A good faithful minister, obviously is, he's going to be kind, gentle, patient with all, that's part of it. But because he preaches the truth, it's going to get him in hot water with people who don't love the truth. The more he looks like Christ, the more it's going to get him crucified.

A good faithful minister is known by the kind of friends he keeps, but also, and maybe even more clearly, it's by the kinds of enemies who oppose him. I agree with the saying, A man who has no enemies has no honor. Why would a good minister of the gospel have enemies? Jesus says in John 15:18 and following,

he said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you're not of the world, and I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me,' guarantee it, 'they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they'll also keep yours.'"

Paul, lived that out, and because he stood firm. Because he spoke clearly. Because he spoke boldly about Christ and his cross. Because he didn't shy away from pressing the claims of Christ and the implications of the cross to people's consciences, pushing them, pressing them, calling them to change, to think differently, to live differently, to live according to different priorities.

Well, he endured all kinds of suffering. He was misrepresented. He was slandered. He was maligned. He was mocked. Beyond the words, he was actually physically beaten. He was jailed, a number of times. He was stoned. He was imprisoned.

Eventually he was beheaded. Before you can tell if a minister has suffered joyfully, you got to ask, has he's suffered at all? Is there any suffering in his life because of his ministry?

Paul uses two different words here for suffering, *pathema* and *thlipsis*. Two words that really differentiate between two kinds of suffering. In the first, *pathema* is more subjective and internal. The second *thlipsis* is more objective and external; as like affliction persecution. Paul experienced both of those. As per his resume in Second Corinthians 11:23 and following, he summarizes quite an extensive list of objective suffering, external forms of physical affliction. He calls them labors, and imprisonments, and countless beatings.

Often, he was near death. "Five times I received forty lashes less one, three times beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times, shipwrecked; a night and day, adrift at sea on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers."

As I sit in my air-conditioned office and type up my sermon, I'm like, none of this is happening to me. It doesn't matter how bad my day is, when I see that resume, I think am a true minister of the gospel. He says in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night. Okay, now there I've been in hunger and in thirst, often without food, cold and exposure. That's his record of external affliction, *thlipsis*.

And in verse 28 he turns to a more subjective internal form of suffering, which, and this does weigh heavily on the heart of every true pastor, he says, apart from the other things, apart from all that other stuff, that's like, that he counts as less. There is the daily pressure on me, of my anxiety, for all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak. Who is made to fall and I'm not indignant.

Every minister, especially as you go through cases of discipline in the church, you see people straying, erring, sinning. You're not hard hearted toward that. Your heart is soft, and it hurts, and you plead in prayer, for people to repent, to come right. You don't want to see them wander off

into sin. Who's weak? And I'm not weak. Who's weak in this church? And I don't feel it.

As Paul writes this letter to the Colossian church, he's, he's, responding, in this letter to a report that came from Epaphras. Epaphras was a preeminent, exemplary ministry of the gospel. He'd planted the, the, Colossian church and probably the other churches there in the Lycos Valley, about 100 miles to the east of Ephesus. He's one of its preeminent ministers, dear man.

Epaphras sought out Paul and Paul's in prison, as he writes this letter in Rome. And he came to talk to Paul, tell him about the doctrinal errors that had been infiltrating the Colossian church and how those errors had upset the stability of the Christians there. It made them feel disqualified in the faith. The people who were purveyors and proponents of this false teaching, we're trying to sever the connection of true believers to Christ, the head; trying to sever the connection between Christ with his church, his body.

And so, as Paul sits in prison in Rome, as he literally is suffering for the sake of Christ, this *thlipsis*, he's, his

deeper concern is really for this Colossian church. These believers, this *pathema*, this, is, internal sense of trouble and turmoil, a sense of anxiety that it brings to his soul. And so, the result and the evidence of the fact that he is suffering joyfully is this Colossian letter. That's what comes out of him.

He is a pastor shepherding a flock. How can a minister suffer all these things joyfully? I mean endure. Grit your teeth and bear it. Bear down. Just get through the trouble. But how can he do that with a smile on his face, a smile on his heart? It's because he knows why he suffers. Back in verse 24, "I rejoice in my sufferings." Why? "For your sake."

He knows for whom he is suffering. It's for your sake. And in my flesh, I'm filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church. Now that brings joy to his heart. Paul suffers joyfully, because he knows he suffers for the sake of actual Christians; flesh and blood people, names, faces. He's not seen them at this point. He will see them later. Later, after he's released from his Roman imprisonment, but at this point he doesn't. He only knows them through the report of a Epaphras, and yet he loves them.

He writes this in chapter 2, verse 1. I want you to know how great a struggle I've had for you, the Colossian believers, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who've not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, etcetera, etcetera. There is good evidence, Paul made it to the churches of Lycus Valley, Colossian, Colossi, Laodicea, Hierapolos after he was released from that first Roman imprisonment.

And so he was able to go see the people he'd been praying for, see the people he wrote, to see the people that he ministered to, even though he had not seen their face. They were very much on his heart, as Colossians 4, 7 through 18 shows. He sent Tychicus to them so, "that you may know how we are, that he may encourage your hearts."

Paul loved them. He's a remarkable, remarkable servant of Jesus Christ, an imitator of our Lord. Paul suffers joyfully. because he knows for whom he suffers, that he suffers for the sake of these actual Christians, people who are dear to Christ, dear to him, dear to Epaphras. He also suffers joyfully because

he knows he suffers for the sake of Christ. He suffers for the sake of the one who suffered and died for him.

His testimony about that is in Galatians 2:20. "I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. In the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, who gave himself for me." If He gave himself for me, how can I withhold myself giving myself for Him? I love him. I love my Lord. I love my Savior.

He died on the cross for me. He bore the shame, and the disgrace, and the indignity, and the pain, and the suffering, that I really should have endured. He bore it for me. He absorbed the full vent of the wrath of God. For every single sin I committed, sins that I'm not even aware of. And Paul says, me the chief of sinners. Christ died for me. How can I not give myself for him? How can I not suffer for the sake of Christ? And when I suffer, I look to Christ.

I say, I didn't die on the cross for anybody. Paul suffers joyfully, thoroughly because he knows he suffers for the sake of Christ Church. He suffers for the sake of the elect people for

whom Christ died. A church to which Paul himself belongs by God's grace. A church that he has joined to. Paul is so pleased to love the church, that Christ loves, to give himself up for the people, that Christ also gave himself up for, that he died for.

These thoughts, suffering for the sake of Christians. Suffering for the sake of Christ. Suffering for the sake of Christ Church. They come together, all come together beautifully. In Paul's autobiographical letter, most autobiographical epistle in Second Corinthians.

Second Corinthians 4:8 and following says this. "We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed; We're perplexed, but not driven to despair; We're persecuted, but not forsaken; We're struck down, but not destroyed; always" caring about "the body of the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you."

The more death puts its arms around me, and squeezes me, and pressures me, and crushes me, the more this treasure of the gospel shines forth and effects all of you. That's what he's saying, and for that he rejoices. So first mark of the cross on the minister is suffering joyfully. Look for that in pastors. Look for that in ministers. Look for that in church members. If you're not finding that, you got to ask some hard questions.

The second mark, mark number two, is Stewarding faithfully, Stewarding Faithfully. Again, just getting an overview here. Can't get into all the details as we'd like to, but serving, stewarding, faithfully is mark number two.

Starting again, verse 24, we'll read through verse 27. "I am filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

In verse 25, Paul refers to himself as a minister, which is actually the word here. The word used is Deacon. *Diakonos* means servant, and then Paul specifies what kind of a servant that he is, when he refers to the stewardship from God. The word *oikonomia* joins the word house, *oikos*, with the word law, *nomos*. So house law, law of the house, or the orderly management of a household, the orderly management of an estate.

That's the kind of servant that he is. And Paul, being an apostle, very different from our ministries, but still, that's how he views himself. He views it as a tremendous privilege. He defines himself; his identity is completely in the one whom he serves. That ought to be true for every single one of us to be a slave, a *doulos* of Jesus Christ. Our identity is not our own. Slaves don't have their own identity. They're identified by who they are owned by. I'm grateful to be owned by Christ. He is my identity.

Paul says something similar in First Corinthians 4:1. "This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and as stewards of the mysteries of God." And for Paul, this is no low

estate, this is no menial position in God's household. To be a servant of Christ, a minister of Christ, it's a high and holy honor. And Paul never quite got over that. Paul has received a stewardship, a great responsibility to manage a divine household, to manage divine resources, managing gospel wealth, overseeing the affairs of the Church of Christ. He's administrating the truth with wisdom, with faithfulness, with patience and gentleness of love, all by the fruit of the Spirit at work in his life, in his ministry.

The chief requirement for those who are chosen to serve Christ, for those who are chosen to steward the treasures, the wealth, the resources of God's household. First Corinthians 4:2. "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found," What? "Faithful." Right.

Trustworthy, that's Paul. Faithful, dependable, totally reliable, utterly trustworthy. The word of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of the cross. Like a seed, the Word comes with its own power. Plant, the seed in the right soil. That seed is going to germinate, grow, grow to maturity, and then produce fruit. That is a high and holy honor. What a

privilege. And he is trustworthy to continue scattering that seed, and watering that seed, and nurturing it, and ministering to those young plants as they grow. Making sure they're protected. And then, and cultivating that plant as it grows, so it bears more and more fruit.

He is an instrument in the hands of God, the vine dresser. Steward understands what he's stewarding. He understands this great privilege that he has, and he never gets over it. He's stewarding the word of God, verse 25. He's steward, the stewarding, a mystery, a mystery that once was hidden for ages and generations now has been unpacked, unfolded. Verse 26.

He's stewarding, "the riches of the glory of this mystery." Verse 27, which he describes plainly as, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That is a profound mystery. I wish we had the time to unpack it. But the way that Paul demonstrated faithfulness in stewarding this mystery, in expositing the great riches of the glory of the mystery, everything we've been unpacking in this conference.

He called people to discipleship. He preached the good news of divine justification. He was intentional about knowing no other message except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He saw his job as taking spiritual truths taught to him with spiritual words, taught directly by the Spirit, joined to him by the Spirit, and then joining them again to spiritual people, men and women, who are truly born again. What a privilege, what an honor.

According to our previous point, even when stewarding the mystery of Christ faithfully, preaching the cross of Christ faithfully, clearly, boldly, even when that brought suffering, Paul kept on going. He continued stewarding the truth, preaching the cross, and doing the suffering joyfully. He modelled what he had commanded Timothy to do, namely "preach the Word, whether in season or out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching." He knows what he told Timothy, Second Timothy, 3:12, "All who desire to live," godly, "a godly life in Christ Jesus." Oh yeah, they will be persecuted. Bank on it. He did it anyway. Joyfully. We understand who it is who gave us this stewardship. It is a stewardship from God.

We understand who benefits from the faithful execution of a stewardship. It's God's saints. It's Christians. People whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world to inherit these privileges, to be set apart, sanctified in Christ, to be recipients of the spirits, ministry of regeneration, to give them a new nature to, to, join them to the family of God with God his Father, Christ as their head. All Kingdom citizens living on enduring eternally.

So man, we seek to be faithful. That's a mark of a true minister of the cross. Cross marks the minister is one who suffers joyfully, stewards faithfully. Here's a third mark. Mark number three: He shepherds diligently. Shepherding diligently, look at verse 28, "Him we proclaim." Who's the Him? The referent closest, verse 27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

"So Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ." "Him we proclaim," that summarizes how we steward faithfully. "Him we proclaim." And when we do so diligently, and clearly, and plainly, preaching Christ brings inevitable suffering, which we endure joyfully.

The thrice repeated word everyone in the Greek It's actually, *panta anthropon, panta anthropon, panta anthropon*, Every man, every man, every man. That's the third mark of a Christian minister, is to proclaim Christ and his cross, and applying the message to each man, to each woman. Diligently shepherding, listen, every single member of the church.

How do we apply that to every single member of the Church? If every single member, every single person, every man, every woman, we're to preach Christ to that person, admonishing them and teaching them with all wisdom, desiring to see them made complete in Christ, grow into maturity in Christ. Steadfastness, stability, strength, maturity, godliness, holiness; Well, what does that require of us as ministers?

When I say, us as ministers, I'm, I'm, gonna use all of us, must say all of us as ministers. What does that require of us as church members? Paul talks about this in terms of being an apostle; mean, meaning, he's a, he's a preacher, he's a pastor, he's a shepherd. He's got a very unique role. None of us are

apostles. There are no living apostles today. It's Paul and the twelve. That's it.

But in his Apostolic leadership, in his Apostolic example, it sets the example for every pastor, teacher, today. Sets the example for every Evangelist, today. Ephesians 4:11, Christ gave to the church gifted men gifted offices to fill particular offices. Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. The evangelist, pastors and teachers still with us. Apostles and prophets their ministry is done. It is here written in the word of God.

So we have everything that we need from their ministry here codified, written in Scripture. The evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers, they take that word from the apostles and prophets and continue to do the work of building in the church. So, in Paul the apostle, the evangelists, and pastors, and the teachers, they see what shepherding requires, what diligent shepherding looks like.

And you know what, every single church member ought to look at their pastors, and evangelists, and teachers, and see

what their ministry requires. What diligent ministry requires. So it all funnels down to every single one of us, every single member of the church. Ministering to every single member of the church. Paul modifies the verb there.

We proclaim, it's one of the biblical words for preaching there, and he modifies that verb with two participles which hit really two sides of the preaching task, admonishing and teaching, a warning and teaching. Admonishing and teaching to admonish. That's the verb, *noutheteo*, which is basically to press the truth to the conscience. To apply the truth in such a way that it commands people to stop sinning or to avoid sinning, and then to get on the path of repentance and righteousness. That's admonishment. So it means exhorting people, warning people.

To teach: the common verb, *didasko*, means to instruct. It's the idea of imparting information, but also helping people to know how to put that information into practice. So not just being a disseminator of knowledge, and facts, and dumping, you know, like an ex, you know, an expository dump truck, that just dumps a bunch of exegetical facts on the church, but actually

helping people to know how to do this. What the implications are for the lives. What's required of them.

Together, those two participles admonishing, teaching, they not only clarify what Christian proclamation really is, they also help us to understand what shepherding diligently really requires. Admonishment requires teaching. Teaching is not just about imparting information, disseminating knowledge. The proclamation of the Word of Christ demands a life change. It presses the conscience. It calls for mind renewal and gospel transformation.

That's why Paul adds there "with all wisdom." Because shepherding requires not just a, a, sledgehammer. It also requires, at times, a scalpel. And sometimes it requires an arm around the shoulder. Sometimes it requires weeping and prayer. Shepherding requires a right and wise application of knowledge to each man, to each woman, for the purpose of their maturity and their growth in Christ.

Now "proclaiming Christ by warning every man, by teaching every man with all wisdom." This is what each minister is

responsible for, and to a large degree, what each one concern, whether he's, whether or not he's being diligent. Everybody knows whether or not they're being diligent in this task. The final clause is a purpose clause that reveals the goal of proclaiming Christ, namely, that we present every man complete, every woman complete, mature in Christ.

That's about the reception of the ministry of the Word, which happens in the heart of every individual. And, it's, that's beyond us. We can't control that. Can't manufacture that. That's the Spirit's work. That's the individual's responsibility before God, By presenting every man mature in Christ, every woman mature in Christ. That goal reveals the true nature of shepherding and the spiritual level of attention required for diligent shepherding. It's what occupies the minds of our elders, the mind of Don and his elders, every single faithful pastor, shepherd, elder.

I, I, see some in this room, and I know that's exactly how they think. It's what keeps him up at night. It's what robs them of sleep. It's what gives them great joy, too, to see people actually changing and growing, getting stronger. Some time ago,

a good friend and fellow pastor directed my attention to John Owen, who's one of my favorite pastors and theologians of the Puritan era.

And he directed me to an article that John Owen wrote called *The Especial Duty of Pastors and Churches*, full of very practical shepherding wisdom from John Owen. One point stood out to me, among so many good points, is that shepherding with diligence and wisdom requires constant and fervent prayer for people. Without prayer, Owen says, "No man can or doth preach to them as he ought, nor perform any other duty of his office."

He goes on to say, "he that doth constantly, diligently, fervently pray for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity and the discharge of all other duties, nor can he voluntarily admit or neglect any of them." Why? Because what you pray for, you work for. Owen tells us what to pray for; being diligent to proclaim Christ to every man, he says, pray for the success of the Word of God. Pray for help against temptations that afflict the Church. Pray about the spiritual state, the condition of each and every member.

He goes on to say this. "There may be those who are spiritually sick and diseased, tempted, afflicted, be mised, wandering out of the way, surprised in sins and miscarriages, disconsolate or sad, troubled in spirit in a peculiar manner. The resemblance of them all ought to abide with ministers, and to be continually called over in daily prayers and supplications."

Owen goes on to describe the kind of every man ministry the apostle speaks of in Colossians 1:28, which is ready, willing, able to confront, relieve, refresh, those that are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation in times of trial and desertion. This kind of ministry requires, as Owen says, "skill, understanding, and experience in the whole nature of the work of the spirit of God on the souls of men, of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit; of the methods and wiles of Satan; of the wiles of principalities and powers of wicked spirits in high places;

"of the nature, and effects, and ends of divine desertions - with wisdom to make application out of such principles, or fit medicines and remedies unto every sore and distemper. This skill

or understanding and experience comes," he says, "by diligent study of the Scriptures, and meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, temptations in their own souls, with a prudent observation of the manner of God's dealing with others, and the ways of the opposition made to the work of his grace in them."

That's a familiarity, an experiential familiarity with the gospel in your own life, in order that you may help others in their life. This kind of shepherding requires us, as Owen says, "to be ready and willing to attend to the special cases that are brought to us in the good and wise province of God, and not," not, "to look on them as unnecessary diversions."

That's a temptation of mine. I'm a task guy. I make lists. I like to check off the list. I like to make sure my list is done. You know what happens in pastoral ministry. Your list is never done. You know how frustrating that is for a guy like me, but it does expose myself centeredness and my not getting it when I'm just a task-oriented guy.

I mean even, even, just saying to the Lord, Lord, anytime I am preparing messages, that I'm studying hard, and I need time to really think. And when you bring, by your Providence, in your sovereign good pleasure, your wisdom, you bring in that divine interruption for me to respond joyfully. When I see that happen, I'm like, thank you, Lord, I'm growing, I'm growing.

Owen says not to look on these interruptions, of the good and wise providence of God, as unnecessary diversions. These are important. These are souls that need shepherding. Owen says, "To discountenance, to discourage any from seeking relief and perplexities of this nature, to carry it towards them with a seeming moroseness and unconcernedness, is to turn away, turn that which is lame out of the way, to push the diseased away, and not at all to express the care of Christ toward his flock.

"Yay, it is our duty to hearken after them who may be so troubled, to seek them out and to give them counsel and direction on all occasions." I, studying Luke's Gospel and get for us as a church, we've been going through this since 2015, but we've been studying in a long time. You know what I see in Luke's Gospel? I see Christ ministering to weary souls. I see

Christ tired, exhausted. But he cares. He addresses every concern, every leper that comes he touches every, every, lame, diseased person brought before him, he reaches down, talks to them, administers his grace, the power of his healing.

Man, that's a, for every single one of us. That's not just the, that's just not the pastor's job is to follow Christ in that. As every one of us, it's our job to follow Christ. Nothing can be so high in your agenda, you set aside the, the, need of the weary, the need of those who need your help, need your shepherding, need your confrontation, need your counsel, need your love, need your encouragement, need your prayers.

Obviously, it's every pastor's job, every elder's job, every deacon's ministry, but this is every Christian's responsibility. It's a joyful responsibility. It's every member's charge to care for one another. The privilege and stewardship of the church, its ministers, its own to its own members, "building itself up in love" as, Ephesians 4:16 says.

That's what we're all to be doing. How would Christ place an obligation on a single pastor or a few elders in a Church of

100 or 200 or whatever the 100 is? How would he put on them the burden of every single minister without employing and enlisting the work of every single minister? Jesus says, "Come to me, you are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest and take my yoke upon you. For my yoke is easy, my burden is light, and you'll find rest for your souls."

They say many hands make light work, right? A church must get with its elders, not just sit on the bus like passengers staring out the window, or worse, disrupting the bus, shooting spitballs at each other, throwing the seats out the window, and don't do any of that. Think in terms of one of those pedal bikes you see at resort areas where everybody's pedaling. That's what church is to be. We together, move together and make this whole thing work together. We minister to one another.

The Colossians 1:28 mandate isn't just for the pastor. It's not just for the elders. It's for every single one of us to do that together. It's our joy. It's our privilege. In today's mega churches with multiple thousands of bus riders, we have to question whether Paul's expectation of an everyman complete in Christ ministry is feasible or even conceivable in such a

context. If not, in a mega church setting, what adjustment should be made? Should we adjust Paul's expectation? Should we say, you know what, it's an outmoded.

Paul said all this stuff back in a time when it's just house churches, whole lot easier. In today's changing world, we're just mega church people. We're mega people. Should we update the outmoded model of shepherding, as Andy Stanley has suggested? Just abandoned the image of the shepherd all together? Cast the pastor instead, in terms of a visionary leader, an attractional speaker, a CEO, whatever?

Well, I'd recommend against tampering with God's love of the shepherding image. He describes himself, in Ezekiel 34 as a shepherd. God sent Jesus Christ to be our Good Shepherd, John 10, "who laid down his life of the flock," and his ministers are charged to follow his example of shepherding diligently.

So, I'd suggest that the adjustment needs to happen, not in the word of God, not in the expectation set by the Apostle Paul, but needs to happen in the heart of every modern believer, to repent of the modern form of the, the, theology of glory. To

embrace this ancient, time tested, biblically faithful theology of the cross, that requires us to shepherd diligently.

I'd suggest we need to abandon the modern mega church model altogether. Tear down the Asherah poles and the Baal altars of tractional preaching, plexiglass pulpits, attractional ministry, hipster jeans, and combination of the, to the, culture of the self, needs to stop. Full stop. Seeker churches for baby boomers, hipster churches for Gen. Xers, sin affirming churches to attract the Gen. Y Millennials, the Gen. Zers.

Any ministry approach that attracts, and accommodates, adjust to every new generation is a worldly ministry, at a compromising ministry, and it's not a ministry at all. What the boomers, the hipsters, the Gen. Xers, Gen. Yers, Gen. Zers, what they really need is the proclamation of Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's what we need. "Admonishing every man, teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may represent every man complete in Christ." That's shepherding diligently.

Number four, number four: striving purposefully. Striving purposefully. Look at verse 29. "For this I toil, struggling

with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." When we hear what's required of in diligent shepherding, it's not surprising it's going to require some toil, sweat. The verb, *Kopiaio*, refers to working hard, working to the point of physical weariness, working to the point of emotional exhaustion, and then struggling. The verb, *agonizomai*, means striving, fighting, and it's a purposeful striving, by the way, it's intentional. It's deliberate. It's not just flailing about like somebody drowning on the deep end.

Paul says something similar in First Corinthians 9:26. I don't run aimlessly. I don't box, as one beating the air. This is in gym training. Paul is in the ring. He's fighting for his life. He's on the battlefield. He's getting shot at, and he's trying to protect people who are being shot.

So, I discipline my body, he said. I keep it under control. Literally, I enslave my body. Why so severe, Paul, lighten up. No! I'm striving for the prize. I'm running to win. Winning, gaining the prize is the purposeful goal he begins to describe in the second chapter. Take a look at it there. "I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at

Laodicea, for all who haven't seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love."

The agonizing labor that Paul put forth, the energizing power of Jesus Christ that he experienced by the Spirit, all being directed toward this singular goal; middle of verse 2, "that all the riches full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

That's what he wants for people. That's the goal. That's, that's, why he's willing to sweat and bleed and go through pain and suffering. He wants them to know, "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He wants them to, to, go through that treasury, opening treasure box after treasure box, and discovering for themselves the great joy and the wealth of the riches of glory that they have in Christ. If they do that, they'll have no other needs, no other wants. 1000 problems are solved with this one thing: Worship Christ.

The message of Christ and his cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. First Corinthians 1:24, Paul is not their

salvation. He knows that Christ is. So, the more the Christians know of him, the more they understand of him, the better use they learn to make of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the greater their assurance. And that's a purpose worth striving for, the assurance of our fellow Christians.

Well, we've covered four marks of Christian ministry so far: Suffering joyfully, stewarding faithfully, shepherding diligently, striving purposefully. One more, mark number five: Safeguarding constantly. Safeguarding constantly. Christian ministry is about constant safeguarding. Safeguarding the flock. Protecting the flock. Why?

Because the strategy of the enemy, he uses a number of different tactics, but it is always the same strategy, and it's to turn Christians away from Christ, to get them distracted with other interests. To flood their minds with 1000 distractions and 1000 worries. Things that they might love more, things they might become attracted to, to a greater degree. He wants them to, not stay attached to the head, who is Christ.

The Christian ministry is about safeguarding the warning. In verse 4, chapter 2, Paul says, I, "I say this in order so that no one may delude you with plausible arguments." Plausible arguments, persuasive, fine sounding arguments. Like what? Well, in chapter 2, look at verse 8: Plausible, credible, credible arguments from, "philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world," as mentioning some of that last night in talking about the wisdom of this world and things that sound plausible to the world.

All the great thinkers of our time and all the provocateurs, all the, all the pundits, all those who were debating, getting into whatever the issue is. It's all philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental things of the world, things that are just like, I mean, the, the, more you go through them, the more you realize there's nothing here. This is the ABC's. Thank you for explaining Critical Race Theory to me. Thank you for cultural Marxism. Thank you for all that.

I, I, appreciate understanding that. But now that I've got it, let's move on. It's really actually, it's actually, not that

hard to figure out. Once you start to learn the, the, lingo, learn the terminology, you're like, okay, got it. You're trying to trade, divide people, create classes of people, oppressors and oppressed, and people who are victims and victimizers, and they just want to divide the world and turn them all against each other. Okay, now that I've got that, I don't need to read any more books on it. Let's move on.

Those who want to keep you, your minds in that world, they're trying to distract you from Christ. What about verse 16, persuasive arguments about, "questions of food and drink, or with regard to" celebratory occasions, such as, "a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath." It's talking about lifestyle. Is there a prescribed lifestyle for us as Christians?

In one sense, yeah. Holiness. We're to pursue godliness. We're to get rid of anything in our life that, that, prevents us from those goals. But does that have to do with food and drink? No. Those things are incidental. Festivals, new moon, sabbaths, binding people's conscience to how they, how they do, these things, that's what was going on in Colossi. Verse 23, Fine sounding arguments regarding "things that have an appearance of

wisdom and promoting self-made religion, asceticism, severity to the body, but they're of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."

Listen, there is so much to bind up people into legalistic living and severe treatment of the body. Asceticism, all that stuff, it has no, sweep it all the way. You know, if people who indulge in that, engage in that, and, and, and, restrict themselves so much, you know what they're doing, they're trying to do sanctification in the flesh. They're trying to battle the flesh with the flesh.

And you know what happens after years of doing that? They're absolutely weary at the end of it and they go headlong into sin and destruction. They develop such deep habits of drinking, and immorality, and everything, because they've, they've, just been trying to suppress the flesh and control it, but never actually being sanctified. They don't have the spirit of God. They have the spirit of the world.

Paul wants to protect the Colossian believers, Laodiceans, and the church in Hierapolis. He wants to protect them. He wants

to protect us, all those he hasn't seen face to face from all of these distractions. It would pull us away from simplicity of faith in Christ. So, the final mark of Christian ministry, once again, like all these marks, is not only for vocational pastors and elders. They are for all Christians to practice to one degree or another, with and their practice with one another.

The final mark is polemical. It's protective. It's the sharp end of the staff and safeguarding constantly. Peter said in First Peter 5:8 to 9, he said, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. So, resist him, firm in your faith, knowing the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

That's how we encourage one another. That's how we protect one another. We safeguard one another. That's Paul interest, Paul's interest, here as well, verses 4-7, chapter 2, "I say this in order so that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in the body, yet I am with you in spirit, I rejoice to see your good order, the firmness of your faith in Christ," stable, steadfast, deeply planted, deeply

convicted, never moving, never changing, but always fixed on Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk that way. You received him in simplicity of faith. You received him with a clear-eyed vision of who he is, what he's like, how glorious he is, what he represents, reconciliation to God. So, if you received him that way, keep on that way. Did that not give you joy, at that time? Did that not fill your heart with delight, to know your sins are forgiven. To know your, your, walking toward Christ, following him into everlasting glory, and then walk that way.

As you receive Christ Jesus Lord, so walk in him, being rooted, built up in him, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. All those concerns, notice them; good order, firmness of faith, rooted in Christ, built up in Christ, established in the faith, holding fast to what has been taught. Paul rejoices in those things. The good discipline, the stability, the growth to maturity, which results in abundant outpouring of what? Gratitude.

You want to see a healthy Christian, one who is marked by the cross itself. Look for gratitude in his life. When you don't see gratitude, when you hear a lot of complaining, a lot of self-centered complaint and grumbling, a lot of drawing attention to one's own concerns, and lot in life, and difficulties, and trials, and all, you don't hear gratitude. You know the difference. This is how the cross marks the minister. He suffers, stewards, shepherds, strives, safeguards for the sake of Christ and his church, for the sake of a local church, for the sake of a local congregation.

The true minister, the cross suffers joyfully, stewards faithfully, shepherds diligently, strives purposefully, and safeguards constantly. Beloved, except no substitutes. Flee from the wolves who want to make merchandise out of you, who care nothing about your soul, but everything about your wallet, everything about your being their fans, and their followers. They want to boast in you, over you. Flee from them. Get out from underneath the impotent influence of hirelings. Those who were just in the job because of the comfort of it.

As I said, air-conditioned office. Not bad. Even on my worst day, I tell my fellow elders, well, hey, it's a tough day, but no one's shooting at me. Hirelings, that's all they want, really, easy life. Comfortable life. Their, their, ministry is impotent. It's prayerless. It's, it's, faithless. It's got nothing to it. They are unsaved people. Many unsaved people in pulpits. Get yourselves out of that. Get yourself and your loved ones into a church with a cross marks the minister and the marks are deep.

Let's pray. Our Father, we give you thanks for clarity of your word in the gospel. We thank you for the living example of the Apostle Paul, who himself, was imitating Christ. We thank you that he's, his ministry, his Apostolic work sets the tone for every single one of us, not just pastors, elders, shepherds, but every Deacon, every minister, every Christian in the church.

We do pray for all faithful churches represented here, and all faithful churches that are, that we know of, that we're in contact with, that we rejoice in, and give thanks to you for. We pray that you would raise up not just the pastors, shepherds, ministers, the official vocational ministers, but you raise up

every single member, to build up the body in love, to be ministering, serving together joyfully, striving together side by side for the sake of the gospel. You would help us to bear the marks of the cross in our lives for your glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of your Spirit, we pray. Amen.