

What is the purpose of the ministry? What's a pastor supposed to do? Because I think there's all kinds of ideas out there about a pastor's job description, isn't there? Sometimes people think that a pastor is called to be an organizer, somebody who helps put things in order, to organize things in the community. Sometimes people think that a pastor is like a CEO, somebody who is over top of a business-like structure to carry out the business of the church. And of course, there's always the old joke that a pastor only works one hour a week on Sunday morning. But what is it that a pastor is called to do? That's what Paul is talking about here in our reading from Colossians. Because he's dealing with the problem in Colossae and talking about what it is that he is called to do as a minister, as a pastor in the Gospel, as a way of calling them back to the truth. And so whenever we listen to what Paul is talking about with his own ministry, we learn something about what pastors are called to do today as well. So we should pay attention to what he has to say.

Because Paul is dealing with this situation in Colossae where they are listening to a number of false teachers, men who had been telling them things that sounded good, that maybe even sounded fairly Christian, but were ultimately leading them away from Christ. And because they were being led further and further away from Christ, they were not growing in their faith. They were not doing what Christians were called to do. And as a result from that, they were not listening to their own pastor, the pastor that we met a while ago in chapter 1, Epaphras, the man who at first brought this problem to Paul and was talking about what was going on in Colossae with him. They didn't want to listen to him, because he was bringing that old message, that thing they had outgrown, that message they had no more use for. And so they didn't really need to pay attention to him. But the problem was, if they weren't paying attention to their pastor, they probably weren't going to listen very closely to Paul either, because Paul was bringing the same message that Epaphras did. And so Paul, to lead them into the truth, to show them the way that they were supposed to go, talks about his own ministry and what it is that he has been called to do, so that they would see through his example why they should listen to him in the first place.

So what was it that Paul was called to do? What is the ministry of God? First of all, the ministry involves suffering. This is what Paul says in verse 24. "I rejoice in my sufferings." And what he means by this is that the ministry brings with it a certain kind of burden. Paul, for example, was beaten on multiple occasions because of the Gospel. Paul was nearly stoned to death on another occasion because of the Gospel. There were many occasions where Paul was out in the wild, walking great distances, being exposed to storms and rain and all kinds of things, for the sake of the Gospel. And not the least of which, Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter because of the Gospel. The ministry brought with it a certain amount of suffering for the sake of Christ.

And in fact Paul himself says that "I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body." That's a pretty bold statement, one that might even be a little hard to understand. But this is what I think that Paul means. He identifies himself with Christ, so closely, in fact, that whatever is happening to Jesus is also happening to him. Jesus is the head of the body, and whatever happens to the head also happens to the body. So Jesus, for example, suffers, and his body suffers along with him. Jesus has died, and his body also dies with him. But Jesus has also risen from the dead, and his body will rise with him on the Last Day. Whatever happens to the head also happens to the body, because they're that closely united to one another. But more than this, Paul is saying, because of his own suffering for the sake of the Gospel, Jesus was

suffering right along with him. Jesus suffers with his body. He still experiences what it is that we are going through. He's still dealing with the things that we deal with, because Jesus knows what it means for us to suffer. And so Paul is not filling up what was lacking in Christ, as if Jesus was insufficient. Not at all. It just shows how closely Jesus is united with his church and in that way is continuing to deal with what his body is dealing with.

But all of this is done, Paul says, for your sake, for the sake of the body. It's not pointless suffering. It is something that he endures so that the body would be built up. All of his beatings, all of his nearly dying on multiple occasions, all of these things meant that the church would be built up in Christ, including the Colossians, whom he had never met. And so in that way they could listen to him and listen to what he had come to tell them, because he was suffering all of these things on their behalf. And yes, Christians, even today the ministry brings with it a certain burden because of the Gospel. What I mean by that is that preaching the Gospel brings with it certain things that are unavoidable. All of the labor that is put into it, all of the mockery that might come along with proclaiming the Gospel, all of these things are part and parcel of being in this office. But all of these things are not pointless. They are meant for for the good of the body of Christ, so that no matter what a pastor has to put up with, no matter what he has to endure, all of these things still build up the body and build her up in Christ to everlasting life.

But what else does Paul say? He says that the ministry is a stewardship, that ministers have been given a duty to proclaim the Word of God. Or as Paul says, "to make the Word of God fully known." What he means by that is that it's not just a part of the Word that the that the minister is called to bring to the church. It's not the easy parts that are easy to talk about. It's not the favorite parts that people might want to hear. It's everything, the hard stuff and the easy stuff, everything that we need to be built up in Christ. And so in that way all of this teaching, all of this preaching is going somewhere. It's pointing toward something, so that we would be built up in Christ to everlasting life.

But it is also a message that is meant for everyone, not just a few people. Not just a few people here to exclusion of everybody else. It is a message which is proclaimed to the whole world. This is why Paul can preach to the Colossians, even though he's never met them face-to-face. Because this ministry which has been given to him is one that is meant for all people. And so the minister is called to proclaim that Word to everyone regardless of who they are.

But beyond all of this too, the minister labors in the Word. All of the other things that he does, as important as they are, are secondary to that labor to make known the Word of God, to make it fully known in the church. This is his duty. This is his obligation that he has been given by God.

What does that look like exactly? Paul tells us in verse 28. He says, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom." The ministry is proclamation, to proclaim Christ and him crucified for the benefit of the church. And that happens through warning and also through teaching. A minister is called to warn, to warn against false teaching, to warn against false teachers, so that we would not be led astray into that which would condemn us. Because the thing is, Christians, false teaching is a sin. It is something that kills the soul. And so the pastor is obligated by God to preach against that, so that we would not be led astray. But more than this too, he is called to teach. To not only warn against the wrong way, the way which

leads to death, but to also preach about what is the right way, to show us what it means to be a Christian, to show us what it means to walk in God. And so in that way, being warned against what is false and being shown what is true, the pastor is showing the way of God to everyone.

But for what purpose? He says, "that we may present everyone mature in Christ." By which he means, of course, that we are growing in our faith, that we are like a plant which is growing up more and more and becoming more and more like Christ. And so God gives the ministry then as a way of building up, as a way of causing us to grow in that faith, so that we would be presented on the last day not immature, but mature in Christ. It is God's gift to his church, to lead her in the right way, so that she would become like Jesus in everything.

And so Christians, God has given the ministry then for the sake of the church, to build her up in the faith, to warn her against what is false, to teach her what is true. And all of this points to Christ. That's a heavy responsibility, and those who are in the office should not take that lightly or be proud as a result of it. It's not a light thing to be the one that God uses for these things. But it is still God's blessing, and God uses the ministry as a means of building us up in the faith. And for that reason then, what we can say about what a pastor does is preaching the Word so that we may be found mature in Christ.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us the ministry as a means of building us up in the faith and showing us the way of your truth. We pray that you would bless all pastors, that they may carry out that ministry to the best of their ability, and through them you would bless your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.