Ministers: Servants of God
Colossians 1:24-29
1258

Pastors are always asking, "Well, how do you approach the ministry? What's your perspective on the ministry? What are your priorities? What are your emphases?" And there is an innumerable variation that occurs in philosophy of ministry and perspective on ministry and methods in ministry across our country.

And I think it's helpful from time-to-time to go back to a basic understanding of the ministry particularly in view of the many who will be coming to seminary in the fall both here and in the Talbot campus and in just helping them to orient a perspective on the ministry I thought we might reexamine what is very basic as Paul outlines his perspective here in Colossians Chapter 1.

You'll notice that Verse 23, which was not read, ends with the statement "Of which I Paul am made a minister." Now as we come to this particular text Paul has just concluded what is a powerful study of the person and work of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

In fact, he has basically been refuting some heretics who had invaded the Colossian situation. And to begin his refutation he restates very clearly the Gospel and he concludes this restatement of the Gospel with the statement, "I of this am made a minister." And that triggers his thinking into the next text.

Having established that he is a minister of the Gospel he then goes on in Verse 24 to define what that means. And without a lot of background in the text I really want to pick it up in Verse 24 and just see really what Paul is saying.

Now let me remind you that the word minister in Verse 23 is the word that we're very familiar with, diakonoswhich simply means a servant. Somebody who serves, a common servant. And I think we have to keep that perspective as we begin any look at the ministry.

The apostle in writing to the Corinthians in Chapter 4 and Verse 1 says that, "It is basic that when we are considered in the ministry we should be considered as stewards and as servants." He uses the word hyperetaswhich means an under row or third level galley slave.

Backing up one chapter, in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 the apostle Paul discussed the fact that he and Apollos and anybody else were simply servants and nothing more.

And very frequently when Paul begins any of his epistles, he begins it by saying, "Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ." So I think the opening perspective on the ministry is to understand that it is service. And although in our society we've taken the word minister and elevated it, it really is a word of

lowliness and humility.

I'm constantly reminded as I study 1 Corinthians for our morning study, and as I often compare it with 2 Corinthians, that all the way through 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians you get the feeling that Paul keeps reiterating the servant mentality of the minister. In both of those epistles that seems to be a very firm emphasis.

And he repeatedly talks about the fact that God's wisdom is seen through human folly and God's power is seen through human weakness. You get the feeling that the deeper the selflessness of the servant, the greater the potential for his ministry. They go in proportion to one another.

John Stott has written in his book entitled, "The Preacher's Portrait" this paragraph: "I cannot help wondering if this may not be why there are so few preachers whom God is using today. There are plenty of popular preachers but not many powerful ones who preach in the power of the Spirit. Is it because the cost of such preaching is too great? It seems that the only preaching God honors, through which His wisdom and power are expressed is the preaching of a man who is willing in himself to be both a weakling and a fool. God not only chooses weak and foolish people to save but weak and foolish preachers through whom to save them, or at least preachers who are content to be weak and seem foolish in the eyes of the world.

But we are not always willing to pay this price. We are constantly tempted to covet a reputation as men of learning or men of influence, to seek honor in academic circles and compromise our old-fashioned message in order to do so. And to cultivate personal charm or forcefulness so as to sway the people committed to our care."

And so it's well that we be reminded by the apostle Paul that we are servants. That's the highest designation of which we might be worthy. And the essence of service is humility. A poet once wrote, "When telling Thy salvation free, let all absorbing thoughts of Thee my heart and soul engross and when all hearts are bowed and stirred beneath the influence of Thy word, hide me behind Thy cross."

That's the spirit of the servant. Paul was a servant. He defines his service in these verses, let's look at them, verses 24-29 and here I want to share with you very briefly, really, eight aspects of the ministry. Eight aspects of the ministry of the servant of God as Paul outlines here by implication his own approach to the ministry.

Number one, the source of the ministry. The first thing that comes from Paul's heart is a statement relative to the source of the ministry. In Verse 23 he says, "I Paul am made a minister." In Verse 25 notice at the beginning, "Of which I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you."

Now Paul had become a minister because of the intervention of God in his life. Paul literally was made a minister. What made him a minister? Was it his education? Was it his ability? Was it his grades? Was it his professors? Was it his desires? Well not really any of those. What made him a minister was the sovereign call of God. And I think that's a perspective that we need to be reminded of.

You know in the world in which we live today the danger is not in not enough people becoming

ministers, the danger may be in too many becoming ministers. Some of whom have not been called of God.

The apostle Paul was clear about his call. In Acts 26:13 he reiterates it. "Midday, oh king," he's talking to Agrippa here, "I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It's hard for thee to kick against the goads. And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make," notice that, "to make," that's the act of God in the life of Paul, "thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee.

Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me."

And then he goes on to say "And Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Paul was made a minister by the decree of God. And he was called in a very dramatic way on the Damascus Road. This became part of his repeated credentials and frequently he relates back to this.

In Romans 15:15, "Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ." Again, it was the grace of God placing Paul in the position of being a minister.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says, in Verse 4, "And such trust have we through Christ toward God." And then in 6 he says, "Who has made us able ministers of the New Testament." Again, the apostle relating his call to the ministry to something that was sovereign on the part of God.

And, of course, the most clear text perhaps of Paul's letters relating this is 1 Timothy 1:12 where he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Who put Paul in the ministry? Not his aptitudes, not his desires, his professors, his grades, his abilities, his education, but God. And I think that's basic. That has to be the source of the ministry.

Looking again at Colossians Chapter 1 you notice in Verse 25 that he says it was according to the oikonomiathe stewardship. It was according to the design of God who gave me the responsibility of managing a portion of his church.

The word stewardship, the word dispensation really means an occasion granted by God for management. An opportunity to serve God, as it were, in the stead of Christ, to manage the affairs of God in relation to his church.

And so the apostle says that it was a device office with a divine call, never anything less than that. That's the way Paul always viewed his ministry.

You remember in the book of Galatians he states the fact that even when he had just begun his

ministry he never consulted with any human being. But that he was instructed by the Lord Jesus, Himself.

Now I don't mean to say by this that we have to repeat a Damascus Road for everybody in the ministry. That just isn't how it is. Each of us may experience the call of God in a unique way. I think that's probably very true but it should be nonetheless the call of God, though it may be less dramatic than this since he was called not only as a minister but as an apostle.

Let me show you another illustration. Go to Exodus 3 for a moment. Exodus, that's in the Old Testament, you remember Exodus. Exodus Chapter 3, Verse 2, "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." Who would this be? Moses. "And he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed and Moses said, 'I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, 'Moses, Moses.' And he said, 'Here I am.'

And he said, 'Draw not near here. Put off thy feet from off the - off thy shoes from off thy feet.' It's a little tough to put your feet off, "put off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' Moreover he said, 'I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look upon God."

Here again you have the call of God in the life of Moses being something that was obviously sovereign. And in Verse 7, the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." God had a burden for a people and God needed a man to execute the response to that burden. And so God calls Moses.

God gave him a plan in Verse 8, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a large and good land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come to me and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

God had a burden and God devised a plan and God chose a man. That's the way it is. That's the way it is in the ministry. God has a burden for his church, God has a burden for the world and God makes a plan and calls a man, or a woman, to fulfill the part of that plan.

And naturally he felt inadequate, Verse 11, "And Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?'" You can understand that. "And he said, 'Certainly I will be with thee.'" And that's the key. "Certainly I will be with thee." "Who am I?" He said, "I mean, that's a big job Lord, who am I?"

When John Knox was called to preach his biographer says, "He burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior from that day until the day he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief

and trouble in his soul." John Knox responded to the call of God with a sense of inadequacy and agony at such a responsibility.

And God's answer to Moses and God's answer to John Knox and God's answer to John MacArthur and God's answer to anybody called into his ministry is the same thing that he said to Moses, "I will be with thee. Doesn't matter who you are, it only matters that I'm there." You see? You see it isn't a question of aptitude or it isn't a question of education. It is a question of the call of God and the consummate presence of God that makes the ministry.

And God said to Moses, "It's sufficient that you know I'm there and that you believe." And then God commissioned Moses in Verse 13, and said "Moses said to God, 'Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your fathers has sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What's His name? What shall I say unto them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM, and he said, thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.'

And God said moreover to Moses, 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.'" That's the essence. You know it's a great thing in the ministry to have the confidence that you've been called, commissioned and sent by God. And you have the confidence that He's with you.

I think about Gideon, you remember Gideon in Judges? I'll remind you. Chapter 6, Verse 1, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years." And then God sets out to call Gideon and he calls Gideon to be His man to deliver Israel.

And in Verse 15, Gideon says, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?" You've got to be kidding, God. I don't have the credentials. "My family is poor in Manasseh." He figured that any kind of conquering would be based on economics. You'd have to buy the forces to pull it off. "And not only that, I'm the least in my father's house."

"And the LORD said to him, 'Surely I will be with thee" and there you have reiterated again the same confidence that Moses was given, that it is not a matter of your ability and it is not a matter of your resources, it is a matter of the call, the commission and the consumable presence of God.

Now I know you remember Jeremiah, Chapter 1, Verse 4, "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee; before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.' Then said I, 'Ah, Lord God, behold, I can't speak. I'm a child.'" You don't want me to be your prophet, I don't have the oratorical gifts.

"But the Lord said to me, 'Say not, I'm a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces.'" Watch this, "For I am with thee." You get that? When God calls and commissions, God is there and he was there in Jeremiah's case.

And in Verse 19, "They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee." And God reiterates it again. God then is the sovereign sufficient source of ministry.

And I just would say that if any of you feel that you desire to go into the ministry and you pursue the thought of seminary or some kind of Christian ministry, be sure in your own heart and in your own mind that you are going into the ministry in response to the call of God.

You remember the words of James in Chapter 3 Verse 1, "My brethren, stop being so many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment." This is not something you run into. This is something you are driven into by God.

God spoke in Jeremiah 23 about some prophets who weren't called by Him and this is what He said, "I have not sent these prophets yet they ran. I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied. Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them," Now watch this, "therefore they shall not profit these people at all." saith the Lord.

There's no profit in a no prophet unless there's the call of God. And I think you would do well to remember also that under the old covenant intrusion into the priestly office was marked as the most dangerous kind of presumption.

In fact, in Numbers 18, I think it's Verse 7, it says the stranger that enters into the priesthood should be killed. And you remember such an indication, don't you, that occurred in the Old Testament? Even our dear Lord, Jesus Christ himself appeared with delegated authority. Do you know that? He appeared not as a self-appointed authority but as the servant of God, called of God.

And Jesus said in John 10 that those who enter the sheepfold as shepherds without his authority were thieves and robbers, not shepherds. So the source of the ministry is God.

Secondly, and we took more time on that than we will on the rest. So you can be comforted in that. Second, not only do we see the source of the ministry but the spirit of the ministry and I love it. Look at Verse 24, "Who now -" what? "-rejoice in my sufferings for you."

What is the spirit of the ministry? Rejoicing. You know something? Now I say this seriously, very frequently the most non-rejoicing, disappointed, discouraged, downtrodden, brokenhearted, grieving, sad, sorrowful lot of people you'll ever meet are in the ministry. That's right. Very true.

I get letters all the time from brokenhearted people in the ministry. You say, "But it's supposed to be joy." Yes, many in the ministry are hesitant, angry, reluctant, bitter, resentful, like Jonah. Others are discouraged and lonely and disheartened like Jeremiah. But Paul gives us the one single right spirit and he says, "Now I rejoice." You say, "Yeah, it's easy for you to say everything's going fine in your ministry." Oh? Paul's rejoicing was never predicated on his circumstances, was it?

He was truly a supernatural man. He lived above his circumstances. You see joy is not some happy go-lucky, giddy frivolity. Joy is the deep down confidence that God is in control and that is satisfying, you see. And if nothing else let's face it, and this is a great thought, I didn't think of it, I'm not saying that, it's a great thought anyway. But it's a great thought to realize that the overwhelming thing in contributing to the joy of Paul was the thought that somebody as unworthy as himself would be given this privilege.

And you remember this morning we showed you in 1 Corinthians 15 that he saw himself as a dead

fetus, the worst thing, the most rejected thing in human existence and he says, "I'll never get over the fact that I'm in the ministry."

He never did it for money, he did it like Jesus did it, for the joy that was set before him. And Paul was always happy because he was always happy in the ministry being so overwhelmed that such a privilege was ever his. He never saw the ministry for what he could gain, or what he could get out of it but for the fact that God had called him to this incredibly high calling, against the grain of everything he knew himself to be. That's the spirit.

And so no matter what was going on in his life, no matter that on the outside he was weeping and on the outside he had continual sorrow and heaviness of heart for Israel on the inside, he could say, "Rejoice always and again, I say rejoice." I think going right alongside joy in the ministry is a sense of unworthiness. So that whatever happens just overwhelms.

And when people lose their joy in the ministry it's usually because they get personal ambition cluttered up with their call. And when their personal ambitions aren't realized they lose their joy they never should have attached to their personal ambition.

The sense of unworthiness and a sense of humility is at the heart of joy because if you know you deserve nothing, if you know you deserve no success, if you know you're a worthless thing, if you know you're a useless thing then anything God does with you is cause for joy, right? Even given you the privilege if suffering for His cause.

Moses at the burning bush saw only his imperfections. Gideon at the threshing floor saw only his imperfections. Isaiah in the temple faced God and cried out, "I am a man of unclean lips." Peter on the shore of Galilee saw the miracle of fish and said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." The sense of unworthiness, inadequacy and humility is always characteristic of the one who knows the joy that comes in being called into the ministry. Paul didn't feel he deserved anything so everything that came was cause for joy.

Thirdly, we see not only the spirit of the ministry, joy, but the suffering of the ministry, and it's gonna be. Especially for Paul, this is a great thought, he says in 24, "I rejoice in my suffering for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Now that's one of those Paulene sentences that defies understanding at the first at the first or the fifth reading. Very difficult.

Let me see if I can unscrew the inscrutable for you for a moment. What he's really saying is not that Christ's atonement was inadequate so I have to bear your sins. That's not what he's saying when he says, "I fill up in me what's left of the afflictions of Christ." Let me just give you quickly what he's saying.

First of all he says, "I rejoice in my suffering." In other words he just was literally overwhelmed by the fact that he would be counted worthy to suffer in the place of Christ. Now here's how he saw it, when Jesus was on the earth they persecuted Jesus, right? Mercilessly, continuously until finally they killed him. And when Jesus died and rose again and then later ascended into heaven, the world was not through persecuting Him. They're still not through.

There are many in the world who still resent Jesus Christ and would persecute His name today. But Paul was saying, "Look, the world is still persecuting Jesus. They're not through with the affliction that is meant for Him. But He's not here and so because they can't get Him they're getting me. And so I have the great joy of suffering the blows meant for Christ, who suffered the blows that should have been mine." See?

"I literally am filling up in my body what remains of the world's persecution of Jesus." And you know what he said at the end of Galatians? He said, "I bear in my body -" What? "-the marks of Jesus of Christ." What were those? Those were the scars all over him. They weren't meant for Paul, they were lashed out at Jesus. But Jesus wasn't around so they got Paul.

And Paul says, "You know what makes me so happy? That I can suffer so Christ can be up there glorified where He belongs." That's a great spirit, isn't it? We endure suffering, beloved, in the place of Christ if we're persecuted for righteousness sake.

I guess maybe that's how we have to look at the suffering in the ministry. We will be misunderstood, misquoted, misrepresented. We will antagonize people, we'll be threatened, accused, ostracized, looked down on and that's a wonderful opportunity to take up in our flesh what remains that was meant for Christ.

And Paul says, "All of this is done -" he ended the verse, "-to build the church. To build the body." There's always a price, there's always suffering if the body is to be built.

Well, then into Verse 25 just briefly, he says, "Of which I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given to me." And again he said the privilege of suffering is given me by God. And Paul did suffer. In fact, if you want to do an interesting study, look up the text where it discusses what made Paul weak and study them for yourself.

Basically there are three, three things brought deep suffering internally to Paul. Number one was lost men, Roman 9. Number two was carnal Christians, 2 Corinthians 2 and number three was false teachers, Acts 20. Those were internal. And then there were all the persecutions externally.

There should be suffering in a ministry. Not because of stupidity or unfaithfulness but because of boldness and in the behalf of Christ, for the sake of the building of the church.

A fourth perspective on the ministry is the scope of the ministry, the scope. Paul has moved into Verse 25 and said this at the end, "to fulfill the word of God." Or literally the Greek would render it, "to give full scope to the word of God."

Now it's hard to pin this statement down, the commentators have been baffled by it and they wrestled with it. In fact there are many interpretations of what it means. Some say it means to fulfill God's word by carrying out an obedient ministry, in Paul's case. Other's say it means to manifest God's truth in his life. Some think it means to preach the Gospel faithfully. Some think it means to teach the whole counsel of God and some think it means to spread the word to the whole world.

I think it means all of those things. I think that's exactly what it's saying, to give full scope to the ministry God's called him to.

Paul came to the end of his life in 2 Timothy Chapter 4 and he wrote and he said this, "I am now ready to be offered." I might as well die, Lord, might as well get me out of here, I'm finished. He says, "I have finished-" What? "-the course, I have kept the faith." Paul had a sense of finishing the work.

In Acts Chapter 20, he says, "I'm going to Jerusalem and all the way along the path people keep telling me that bonds and afflictions await me but none of these things move me," he says. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course."

God had given Paul a ministry and God had shown him the scope of that ministry and his one desire in life was to give full scope to that, was to fill it out. If it was evangelize he was to do that, if it was to edify he was to do that. He was to proclaim the whole word to the whole world that God called him to.

And so in Acts 20 you hear him say, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." I think the scope of the ministry is the parameters that God sets. Whatever they are, God gives us a ministry and He expects us to fill it out. Now that's very subjective and for every individual it may be very different.

But I'll say it this way, unless you are willing to give your life totally and completely and diligently and work hard and long with great effort, you'll never do it. You'll never do it. Because God gives us, I believe, the scope of the ministry dependent upon a total commitment and maximizing of all that we are.

And so if you would think to enter the ministry as an easy way to go, you'll never fulfill the scope of the ministry. Now while I think about this let me reiterate something that we went over some many months ago, maybe over a year ago, we need to fill out the ministry but we don't need to panic about reaching the whole world.

Some ministers get carried away, you hear them on television say, "We want to reach every person in the world." I heard one fellow say, "I want to be the pastor of the world." Well, I don't want to be the pastor of the world, I have enough trouble being the pastor of Grace Community Church, growing at the rate that it's growing.

But let me just tell you a little bit about Jesus. You know Jesus had a sense of economy of effort. Have you ever noticed that? David McKenna said, "Self-styled Messiahs are megalomaniacs. Their sense of mission has no limitations short of conquering the world and conquering it now. At the slightest signal that their efforts are being frustrated, they usually respond with rage and madness."

Well Jesus wanted to reach the world but He had a sense of economy of effort. Did you know what His limits were? Let me remind you. Number one, Jesus limited His ministry to the Father's will. That's right. In John 5:30 He makes that very clear. The only thing He did was that which the Father designed for Him to do.

So primarily in the ministry you need to work through what it is that God has designed for you to do. The first limitation was the will of God. The second was a sense of divine timing. He wasn't panicked into doing everything at the same time.

In John 5, I think it's Verse 25, He says, "The hour is coming." In John 6 you have a similar indication. Verse 15, "When Jesus therefore perceived they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed." In other words, there was a knowledge within the mind of Jesus that there was a time for everything and there was a place for everything and there was a win in God's mind and in God's will and in God's plan.

And in John 7:30 it says, "They sought to take Him but no man laid hands on Him because His hour was not yet come." And in John Chapter 8, just wandering through, it says in Verse 20, "And no man laid hands on Him for His hour was yet come." Repeatedly you have this idea that Jesus knew what His timetable was. And so His ministry was limited by the will of God and by the timing of God.

Thirdly He had limited objectives. When Jesus first came, according to tenth chapter of Matthew and the ninth chapter and the thirteenth verse as well, He says that He came, "Not for everybody but for the lost sheep of-" What? "-the house of Israel." He has some limitation.

In fact, the longer you follow the ministry of Jesus, you the more He limits that ministry until the last years of His ministry are pretty much given totally to twelve individuals. Jesus limited Himself then, according to the will of God, the timing of God, the objective of God, which primarily began with Israel.

Fourthly Jesus limited himself in terms of the subject He dealt with. What do I mean by that? He never let anybody pull Him into politics. He never let anybody pull Him into economic struggles. He never let anybody pull Him into a revolution. He knew exactly what He was to do and He never varied one whit from that.

And then, not only these things, but it's obvious to, and I'm sure by now you've seen it, that Jesus related Himself to people in a very limited way. In the first place you remember that He said to some of the Jewish leaders, I have only come not for those that are well, but for those that are - what? Sick. So He limited Himself to the people who really wanted His ministry.

And then as it even narrowed down further to His own disciples, from them He gained, as it were, the ultimate end of reaching the world. So there were some very obvious limitations in the ministry of Christ in order to accomplish the vastness to the ultimate extension of His work.

And I think the apostle Paul is a good example. He does the same thing. He went on three missionary journeys but basically all three of them were back to the same place and each time he just stretched it a little bit. He had an economy of effort. The principal is simply this, to give full scope to the word of God means to obey God's call, to use God's gifts, to obey God's will in God's time on God's priorities and let God extend it.

It boils down to what we believe and what we call the sense of priority which says this, "I'll worry about the depth of my ministry and let God take care of the breadth of it." And so Paul saw the scope of what God called him to do and he did it and it never really went much further than that third little missionary journey and finally got to Rome. And it never went any further than that but it touched the world.

Number five, Paul speaks of the subject of the ministry, the subject of the ministry. Verse 26, here he details his message very clearly. And what was this message? This word of God which we gave full scope to? It was "the mystery which was hidden from ages and generations, but now made manifest to the saints to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles." And what is the mystery? "Christ-" what? "-in you."

This was his message, this was the subject. He was declaring, not only was there a Messiah and not only was the Messiah going to come but the Messiah wanted to dwell in his people. Now that's news, folks. That's a mystery. A mysterion, a mystery in the New Testament is something that's been hidden in the old. That's exactly what it says in Verse 26, "Hidden from ages and from generations, and now made manifest."

And what is the mystery? The unknown thing to the Jewish people? They never knew that Messiah would dwell in them. The great mystery that Paul proclaimed was the indwelling Christ. That not only talks about salvation but that talks about all that having Christ in us can possibly mean.

I always think of Ephesians 3:19 where he says, "I pray that you would understand what it is to be filled with all-" What? "-the fullness of God. And that understanding that you would recognize that that which is exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think can really be done in you."

Full scope of the ministry led to the right subject which was the indwelling Christ which was the hope of glory, the guarantee of future blessing. We could say so much about that. The message of Christianity is the indwelling Christ. That was Paul's message.

Sixthly, we see him reiterate a word about the style of the ministry, the style of the ministry. Verse 28, "Christ," the antecedent "whom we preach" and here it comes, one is negative and one is positive, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." What is the style of the ministry? Two things, warning and teaching. That's got to be a duality you can't ignore. Both have to be there.

On the one hand there is the positive teaching, on the other hand there is the negative warning. The word for warning there, you know it, it's noutheteo,the admonishing. The word simply means to give encouraging counsel in the light of sin and the inevitability of coming chastening.

If other words, if you keep going down that path, you're gonna get into trouble. That's admonishment. So vital, it must be done. Fathers are called upon to do it in Ephesians 6:4. Eli, the old priest, was told that the reason that he lost his children was because he failed, and his priesthood, incidentally, he failed to admonish them, the Septuagintsays.

It's a firm gentleness that says, "You can't do that." And listen, that takes a little courage and a little boldness. But that's the style of the ministry and sometimes Paul was up preaching the positive word of God and other times he was saying, "Hey, Peter, you are to be blamed brother. Shape up." Remember that in Galatians? Had to be.

So the style of the ministry involves admonishing and teaching, both have to be there. And of course, the sum of all of that would be the imparting of all wisdom, all God's wisdom. The whole counsel of God.

Boy, it's so important, you know, to teach people wisdom, and that's not some ethereal foggy concept but the practical wisdom that the Psalms talk about. You know, in Ephesians Chapter 6, it says, "Take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God." And the word for sword is a little dagger and the word for the word of God is rhemaand it means specific statement.

And when you teach people the word of God you're not just buying them a Bible, you're teaching them the specific statement of God related to the specific temptations so they can use the dagger at that point. You must give the whole counsel of God.

Every time I hear somebody say, "Well, we just want to ease them into the church. So we don't do much teaching." Yeah, well then you have in a sense missed the point. Because the style of the ministry is to warn and teach, not coddle people. Now you do it lovingly and gently, but firmly.

Seventh, our time is going so we'll hurry to the finish. Seventh, the sum of the ministry. S-U-M, the sum of the ministry - watch it at the end of Verse 28, "that we may present every man complete, or mature, perfect in Christ Jesus." That's what it all adds up to, Paul says.

The reason I'm a servant and the reason I rejoice and the reason I suffer and the reason I want to give full scope to the ministry and the reason I go everywhere teaching Christ in you and warning is that all these people that I touch may come to completion in Christ.

Now that concept is used two different ways. In Colossians 2:10 he seems to be using it there in reference to just being a Christian, totally complete in Christ. And so maybe what he's saying here has the idea of evangelism, winning people to Christ.

But certainly in other areas Paul speaks of this perfection or this maturing thing as a progressive thing in the life of a believer. And I know well enough that he desired to see that fulfilled also, and so did his friend, Epaphras in Colossians 4:12 who always prayed "that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

So Paul preached and admonished in other to bring people into the completeness positionally in Christ and then he continued to warn and continued to teach the believers in order to bring them to maturity in the will of God. And that's really the goal of the ministry.

In Ephesians 4:11 it says, God has given some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some teaching pastors "for the perfecting of the saints." That's the goal of the ministry that he may present all men, all men perfect in Christ. He wanted to be sure that everybody that he touched came to perfection in Christ.

That's the sum of the ministry and you know something? It takes a lot of work, a lot of prayer and a lot of anxiety and some tears and some struggle but that's the sum of it all.

Listen, everything from the source, the spirit, the suffering, the scope, the subject, the style, the sum of the ministry is so fantastic and so grandiose and so divine that after a message like this I feel like resigning, if it weren't for number eight, the strength of the ministry.

And what is the strength of the ministry? "For this also I labor, striving according to", listen to this, "His working which works in me,-" what? "-mightily." What's the strength of the ministry? We're right back aren't we, to Exodus? We're right back to Gideon, we're right back to Jeremiah, God is the strength, God is the source. He says, "For this I labor." Listen, and he uses the word there that's toiled to the point of exhaustion.

The ministry is hard work. You're a hardworking farmer Paul says in Timothy. You're a disciplined athlete who runs by the rules; you're a solider who endures hardness. It's not easy, it's hard work. It's agonizing, it takes maximum effort but you don't do it alone. It's His working, working in you mightily.

What a privilege is ours to minister, what a privilege. It is said that Charles Haddon Spurgeon, wonderfully gifted by God as a powerful preacher, no one ever denied that, used to say to himself over and over again as he slowly mounted the steps to his pulpit, these words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe in the Holy Ghost."

Spurgeon also wrote this, "The Gospel is preached in the ears of all, it only comes with power to some. The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher; otherwise men would be converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preachers learning; otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach 'til our tongues rotted, 'til we exhaust our lungs and died and never a soul would be converted unless there was mysterious power going with it, the Holy Ghost changing the will of man."

"Oh, sirs," he said, "we might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the Holy Ghost be with the word to give it power to convert the soul."

And Beloved, anybody in the ministry is simply a servant to that power. That's all, nothing more. If God has called you to this ministry, God empower you to fulfill it.

Let's pray. Thank you Father for a wonderful time of sharing in the word tonight and even though these words have been in many ways inadequate and perhaps we didn't say all that was in our heart to say, we do pray that you'll bind to our hearts what is from you and make us all into the kind of ministers of Jesus Christ that we should be. We pray in Christ's wonderful name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org

COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).