

# Colossians - Serving the Church

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of serving the church by communicating God's Word and caring for God's people.*

**Duration:** 33:20

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:11-12, John 13:35, John 19:30, Ephesians 3:19, Colossians 1:24, Colossians 1:27-28

**Topics:** "Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of delivering the word of God in its entirety. He highlights the need to not only focus on Jesus Christ's divinity and the need for evangelism, but also on his humanity and the building of the church through worshiping fellowships. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of addressing contemporary social issues and ethical responsibilities. He references the apostle Paul as an example of someone who admonished, corrected, and warned people based on scripture, with the expectation of repentance. The sermon concludes with the preacher sharing his own experience as an interim minister and expressing his hope for a suitable pastoral settlement based on the truths from the Word of God.

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## Transcript

Reading from God's written word from the letter of Paul to the Christian community of Colossae in Asia Minor, Colossians chapter 1, beginning to read at verse 24. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness.

The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

To this end I labor, struggling with all energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart, united in love, so that they might know the mystery of the full riches of the complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments, for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. The last century was a century of very famous preachers. In Britain, one of the outstanding preachers was Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

In the United States, a man by the name of Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher and Spurgeon did not have much in common theologically, but they were among the most renowned of pulpit orators in their day. And like Spurgeon, Henry Ward Beecher had a wry sense of humor.

One time when Beecher was delivering lectures on preaching at Yale Divinity School in New England, he was asked by a young pre-ministerial student, Dr. Beecher, is there any particular reason for short pastorates? Without batting an eye, he answered, yes, the mercy of the Lord. I'm wondering if down the corridor of time, Beecher was thinking of my six month stint as your interim minister here in Knox Church. Take that too as an evidence of the mercy of the Lord.

It could have been seven months. As one who is not under consideration by the vacancy committee, and as one who is heartily involved in the process that hopefully will lead to a suitable pastoral settlement, there are some truths from the Word of God that I would like to share with you today. With this in mind, to help you in discerning God's command for this situation, and to help you to help that person realize to the full what God says in his Word concerning the work of the gospel ministry.

According to our text, the gospel ministry involves communicating God's Word. It also involves caring for God's people. The first major emphasis in our text is that Christian ministry, the ministry of the gospel, primarily consists in the communicating of God's Word.

In verse 24, the Apostle speaks of himself as a servant, a servant of the gospel, a servant of the church. And the Greek term that is here translated servant is a very interesting one. It's the word diakonos, from which our Baptist friends derive the office of deacon.

And in the New Testament, that had nothing at all to do with seeking status, that had everything to do with rendering service. For you see, a diakonos, according to common Greek, was a table waiter. He was at the beck and call of the management and of the clients.

And here the Apostle takes that word and applies it to himself. I am appointed to be a servant. In the Corinthian congregation, people played personalities and politics.

And the Apostle Paul felt constrained to write to the Corinthian Christians and to tell them, what is Paul? What is Apollos? Don't make a big thing out of human personalities, because all we are are servants. All we are are diakonos. All we are is table waiters.

We are servants of Jesus Christ, through whom you have come to put your faith in him as your Savior. A congregation may issue a call. A presbytery may induct a minister.

But it is Jesus Christ and Christ alone who summons men to be his servants, his ministers, and therefore their ultimate accountability for the way they do their work or fail to do it is to him alone. A servant and a sufferer. He speaks about experiencing something that makes up what is lacking in regard to the sufferings of Christ.

Is Paul intending to say that on that cross the redemptive work of Jesus was not consummated, that it was not completed, that there is something that has to be added by his own efforts and sacrifices to make up what is lacking in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ? That suggestion would be utterly blasphemous. For on that cross, as recorded in the 19th chapter of John at verse 30, Jesus cried out in triumph, it is finished. Full atonement has been made for sin and we need not suffer to work off our transgressions but merely to rely on Jesus as the one who paid it all.

But what the Apostle is saying here is not that there is anything imperfect about the atonement of Christ to which he must add something. What he says is that in a world of indifference and hostility, doing the work of the Lord, evangelizing the heathen, building up the church, is something that's going to involve suffering because in this world Christ's servants will experience tribulation. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, said Jesus, when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake and the sake of the gospel for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

That is what Paul is speaking about, that the sufferings in a sense were not finished when Jesus left this earth but the fellowship of his sufferings is experienced by all those who while they cannot make atonement are so closely associated with Jesus that the things that are hurled at him also hurt and wound them. A servant and a sufferer and a steward, for he speaks about being entrusted with the Word of God and he tells us that as a steward, as one who is entrusted, as one who is accountable to his Lord and Master, he must present the Word of God fully. Now that certainly doesn't mean taking all the teaching of the Bible, wrapping it up into one homiletical sack and dumping it on a congregation in 20 minutes flat.

What it does mean is that over a period of time God's servant, God's steward must present the Word of God in all its fullness. That's what the Apostle Paul told the Christian elders at Ephesus, I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. As you might have guessed from my non-Scottish nomenclature, I love things like lasagna and tortellini and linguine and every other kind of ini, but if that is all my wife served me in the 42 years of our married life, I would have had a rather unbalanced and lopsided diet.

You need balance. You need fruit, you need vegetable, you need meat, you need fish. And even so, in feeding the flock of God, there must be a whole range of biblical truth, the delivery of the Word of God in its fullness.

Not only to stress that Jesus Christ is divine and therefore an object of worship, but to emphasize that he also became man and shares our trials and our temptations. Not only to stress the need of world evangelism, but to stress the edification and the upbuilding of the church through witnessing, worshipping, fellowships. Not only to stress the blessed hope that Jesus is coming again someday, but to emphasize contemporary social action and ethical responsibility in facing the moral dilemmas of this half of the 20th century.

Not only to stress the unity of God, but the triunity God revealed in three persons. Not only to stress divine sovereignty, election, and predestination, but man's responsibility to be confronted with a choice for or against Jesus Christ. I am a servant, says Paul, and a steward, and my responsibility is to present to you the Word of God fully, the whole range of truth.

See to it that whomever you call as your pastor will have adequate time to study the Word in all its fullness, that he may be able to present it to you whole, without neglecting one thing in order to give an exaggerated emphasis to another. I am a steward who must not only present the Word of God fully, but

declare the mystery of God. A mystery once hidden and now revealed.

Namely, that it was the grand design of God not only to call Abraham and the seed of Abraham, but that through Abraham and his seed to bring the blessing of salvation to all the nations of the earth. That is God's mystery, that is God's open secret, that Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free, cultured and barbarian, should together be given access to God through the merits of Jesus Christ and with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. To declare the mystery of God and to proclaim Christ, Him we proclaim.

And notice how it is that Paul proclaims Christ. Notice how it is that a minister of the gospel must proclaim Jesus Christ. A person, we proclaim Christ and a presence, Christ in you, and a prospect, the hope of glory.

The Christian pulpit today can be so preoccupied with a million issues that Jesus Christ gets lost in the shuffle and is not given the place of prominence and preeminence that belongs to him alone. Listen for the preaching of Christ. Listen for what exalts the person of our blessed Redeemer.

If we have him, we have all that we need. If we do not have him, then we need to mourn with Mary. They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have placed him.

And to stress not only the person of Christ but the presence of Christ, Christ in you. It is a cold, arid, spurious form of the Reformed faith or of biblical Calvinism that does not stress the inward experience of Christ in the human heart. And how we need to stress Christ in you, not only for this life but for the life to come, he is the hope of glory.

To proclaim Christ and to admonish all. The person who in the providence of God you will call to the pulpit of this church will, if he is faithful to the teaching of Scripture, use the written word not only for instruction and doctrine but for reproof and for correction in righteousness. And when this is done it will not be palatable but it certainly should be profitable.

The Apostle Paul was a person who laid it on the line in no uncertain terms. He admonished people. He corrected them.

He warned them. And when the man of God warns, admonishes, and corrects, and reproves on the basis of Scripture, there should not be resentment but there should be repentance as the proper response. Writing to the Galatians after giving that terrible catalog of human vice, sexual sin, social sin, financial sin, spiritual sin, he says I warn you now as I have done before that those who habitually follow this kind of lifestyle cannot, shall not, must not inherit the kingdom of God.

He reminds the Corinthians with whom the hangover of their ungodly past still unhappily lingered on to spoil their spiritual experience, that they would have to see to it that they would be a complete break, not only with sexual immorality but with financial dishonesty and with spiritual pride because those who habitually and impenitently engage in this kind of lifestyle shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Admonition, warning, correction, based on the Word of God is the kind of lancing of boils and surgery of problems which a biblical ministry must face and which I trust as God's people, you and I together under that ministry, will appreciate. And then teaching wisely.

It's interesting that when Paul mentions in the fourth chapter of Ephesians the gifts that Christ has given to enrich the church, he mentions apostles and prophets and evangelists. He mentions pastor, teacher. A pastor is a shepherd who feeds the flock and the evergreen pastures of the Word of God.

Teaching. Teaching Christian doctrine without apology. Teaching Christian duty without compromise.

Teaching wisely. In the Jewish synagogues following the apostolic era there was a very interesting development that took place. The religious teachers used to be known as Amorim, the speakers, men who declared, thus saith the Lord.

But with the passing of time they came to be known as the Seborim, no longer the speakers who declared the mind of the Lord but those who hemmed and hawed and straddled the fence. I think, I wish, I suppose, I imagine, I feel, but I don't really know. How we need a pulpit that is forthright on basic issues.

Pray that God will send such a person and that we all together as elders and congregation may rally behind that sort of ministry and give it full approval by the life we live between Sundays. Laboring strenuously in the communication of the Word of God. A cynic once commented that life is like a football game played out on the gridiron by real red-blooded men and explained by the minister in the stands to the ladies.

Now obviously that person had never really been involved in pastoral ministry. The visitation of the sick, the counseling of the perplexed, the administration of a complex parish, the study of the Word of God, dealing with interpersonal relationships. These are things that call for labor.

These are things that call for strenuous effort. These are things that are demanding and exhausting, especially if the pastor is going to strive to present every one of us perfect in Jesus Christ. You see, it's not merely the matter of making sermons but of producing people fashioned after the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if that doesn't take effort and if that doesn't sap energy and if that doesn't call for the inflow of the power of God through the prayers of God's interceding people, I don't know what does. Communicating God's Word. But the major aspect of the pastoral ministry is caring for God's people.

We're not dealing here with a mere pulpiter, though even a mere pulpiter would be an improvement over the kind of ministry that I once heard described as suffering from foot and mouth disease. He couldn't preach and he wouldn't visit. Now, at least the pulpiter knows how to speak, even if he doesn't always know what to speak.

But according to the Scriptures here, it's not merely a matter of communicating God's Word but of caring for God's people. It's not cold professionalism. It is warm involvement in the lives of men and women under God.

And in describing this caring aspect of Christian ministry, he stresses that he wants to see God's people encouraged in heart. Paul knows what it's like to be disappointed. He was no ivory tower professor with a long-term guarantee of tenure in some quiet idyllic spot.

He knew what it was to be disappointed by a world of indifference and hostility. He knew what it was to be disappointed by trusted people with whom he worked in serving the Lord. He knew what it meant to be disappointed because his appeal was shunted aside time after time with interminable delays which could have been speeded up if only it had greased the palm of some petty Roman official.

He knew the meaning of disappointment. He knew the meaning of darkness and of dampness in a Roman dungeon. He knew how people could become dispirited, broken down, at a loss as to what to do next.

And he saw it as one of the aims of pastoral ministry, that they should be encouraged in heart. Do you get discouraged? I do. I get discouraged when I know what I should do and I fail to do it as I should.

I get discouraged when I thought that everything was sailing along fine and then, there I go, I've done it again. I get discouraged but then I remember that he who began a good work in me will perfect it till the day of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle Paul wants Christians not to lose heart.

We may go forward two steps and back one but the general direction has been set. God who laid his hand on you will not let you go. He loves you with a love that will not let you go and not even death can separate you from that love.

Be encouraged in heart for he who started the whole process, electing you in love before the foundation of the world, he who called you, he who justified you, will glorify you at the last. Count on it. He's as good as his word and be encouraged in heart.

And be established in love. The Apostle was very concerned that in a world of prejudice, in a world of brokenness, in a world of conflict, Christians should at least be the demonstration of God's power to bring unity and order out of chaos and conflict. And how it must have broken the heart of Paul to run into Christians who were brittle, Christians who were easily irritable, Christians who were petty, Christians with a chip on their shoulder, Christians insisting on their prerogatives, Christians negligent in the rendering of their service, Christians unwilling to stoop down and wash one another's feet, Christians unwilling to forbear and to forgive.

In my past 42 years of biblical ministry I've been to hundreds upon hundreds of churches and heard the outpouring of woe specifically on Monday mornings from broken-hearted ministers. And I'm wondering if instead of the burning bush our symbol should not be the porcupine bristling in every direction. No, says the Apostle, we must be encouraged in heart and established in love.

By this said Jesus shall all men know that you are my disciples when you have love, sympathy, understanding, caring for one another. Moreover, says Paul, I want to see God's people enriched in knowledge. I want to give them the tools by which they can begin to dig down into the minds of Scripture and come up with gold and precious stones.

I want to be able to help God's people to discover the vastness of biblical truth and how it applies to daily living. A pastor concerned for his people, caring for his people, will want to stimulate them in small groups and cells in the study of the Word of God at close quarters and enduring in faith. The form of expression that the Apostle uses here is, heavens forbid, a military term.

He was a man of peace, but he also knew that in this present world the church must be militant because it's under attack. The church is under attack from false teaching, the church is under attack from bad morality, and the church must take a stand over against these attacks and stand firmly in the faith together. And the word that is used by the Apostle is good order.

Not an army in retreat, not an army scattering in disarray, but an army that united in love and encouraged in heart and enriched in knowledge is also enduring in faith. We believe, and on the great doctrines of Christianity there should be no divergence whatsoever, a solid front, not in disarray, but compact with a united stand against the enemies of the church, standing for the faith, standing for the King. Dear brothers and sisters, within a few weeks you will be hearing at least two godly men coming from thousands of miles

away to see whether their future is here and for you to see which in the providence of God might be called as your pastor.

There may be others from other parts of the world before the process runs its course, but I ask you to be more than sermon tasters and impression gatherers. Pray, be open to the Spirit of God and desire above all the glory of Christ and the good of the church so that the decision that you and I make together will be a responsible one under God, a pastoral ministry, communicating God's Word, caring for God's people. Let us pray.

Lord, clarify our vision and help us to set our sights on things that are in keeping with your will, that we will not judge or prejudge according to the flesh, but enlightened and made sensitive by your Spirit. Unite us in love. Enrich our knowledge.

Help us to endure in the power of a living faith through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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