

I once received a chain-letter, entitled, “The perfect pastor”.

The perfect pastor is tall, slim, athletic, good looking, and doesn't leave others feeling inadequate.

He is 28 years old, and has 25 years preaching experience.

*He preaches eternal truth in exactly ten minutes,
Frequently condemns sin and social evils, but never upsets anyone.*

*He works from 6am to 11pm 6.5 days a week,
is also the groundsman and cleaner, and never gets tired or grumpy.*

He spends much time visiting the sick and the contagious, and he never has a sick day.

*He earns \$500 a week, wears good clothes
Buys good books*

*Drives a late-model, well-maintained car, Owns his own home
Buys his own church resources,
Covers phone and internet charges himself,
Is generous to the poor,
And tithes \$100 a week to the church.*

*The perfect pastor has limitless patience, gentleness and kindness,
But is also a strong and vigorous leader... Decisive too...*

*He gives of himself completely to others,
But never gets too close to anyone, lest he be criticised for having favourites.*

*A perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers,
And he also spends all his time with senior citizens.*

*He makes 15 visits daily to parish families, shut-ins and
hospital patients.*

*He takes RE, spends time getting to know the towns folk,
Meets regularly with the other ministers,
delivers meals on wheels, is fully involved in the community
And is always available at the church office or manse to
receive phone calls or visitors.*

*The perfect pastor is a person of deep spirituality and wide
learning,
But of down-to-earth practicality,
A capable administrator, a financial genius,
A wise counsellor,
An architect and a builder.*

*If your pastor does not measure up to these expectations,
simply send this letter to six other parishes that are tired of
their pastors too.*

*Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the
top of the list.*

*In one week you should receive 1643 pastors in return. At
least one of these should be perfect.*

Warning:

*One parish broke the chain and they got their old minister
back in less than 3 weeks.*

One of the advantages of preaching your way through a whole book of the Bible, is that the preacher doesn't get to choose the topic... And today's topic is one that, if it were up to me, I'd probably never choose it. It's about the role and the purpose of a pastor and a teacher (or minister/priest [whatever you want to call them]). And it's about the relationship between these people, and the people they minister to.

And the temptation for a teacher to avoid this topic, is because we don't want to appear "self-serving". I'm just as reluctant to preach on this topic, as I am to preach on "giving". But God's brought this topic before us today (because it's in His word), and with God's help, I'll do my best, to help us to understand it.

I guess what I've observed in the church, is sometimes a church has too **high** of a view of a Pastor, and sometimes they have too **low** of a view of a pastor...

So for instance, I remember when I was a member of a church in Dalby, our church was one of those who had an enormously high pulpit. I think it had 4 or 5 steps to get to the preaching position. And we were having a church meeting because we were wanting to remove all of that paraphernalia, to have more of a basic, 1-step-up stage, so the space was more usable...

Anyway, in that meeting, one dear old lady said, "When I come to church, I like too look up to our minister." You see, that perspective comes from an era when a minister was put on a pedestal (of sorts). But even today, I've seen how some pastors are almost hero-worshipped by their congregation... BTW, I'm pretty sure we don't have that problem here.

But then again, sometimes churches have too **low** of a view of their pastor. *I remember when I was a minister in a previous church, one of the elders (with great sadness in his voice) said to me, “We’re a church that has a history of destroying its ministers.” I think he told me, that as a church (or some in the church) had destroyed the last 4 ministers that God had sent to them...*

Sometimes pastors cop it pretty hard.

The very first Sunday I preached at my previous church, I said “My aim is to make everybody happy. Some of you are very happy that I have come. And the rest of you will be very happy when I leave...”

We can make a joke of it, can’t we..., but let’s hear what God has to say.

From the tone of the letter to the Corinthians so far, it’s pretty obvious that although Paul planted the church in Corinth, and although He’s the one who led them to Christ, he’s now fallen out of favour. They don’t want to listen to Paul anymore, because they disagree with him.

And regarding Apostles/teachers/ministers he said, “**This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

Now, notice who they are servants of: They are **not** servants of the church members; They are not servants of the church

leaders; They are not servants of the congregation or of the community. They are servants of **Christ**.

This, is the calling of a minister. And as we'll see later in this same chapter, sometimes being a servant of Christ, will put a minister at odds with others in the church (and perhaps particularly with other 'leaders' in the church).

So, they are servants of Christ, but they are also stewards of the mysteries of God. What does that mean?

The mysteries of God have got nothing to do with God being an unsolvable puzzle – A mystery is something which, we didn't **used** to know, but now it's been revealed by God... OK, so the teaching of the Christian faith, has been entrusted to the apostles; it's been entrusted to the teachers, to make it known...

And as we found last week, it's pretty important that a minister/teacher gets their teaching right, and that's confirmed again here, in V2 ² **Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.**

For a minister to be a faithful steward of the revelation of God, means that he doesn't only have to get it right, but it is his **duty**, to keep going, and not give up... *I have known so many ministers, who have had bad experiences in churches, and what happens??? They burn out, and they withdraw. They've left the ministry that God called them to...*

But a steward should be found faithful... And for a minister to be faithful to his calling, he has to understand this one truth: God is the only one who gets to judge his performance...

Now of course we know this, but let me tell you how very hard it is for a minister to **not** worry about the judgment of others...

Considering Christians are supposed to be epitome of love and forgiveness and encouragement, it's quite disturbing how often 'roast preacher' gets dished up for Sunday lunch...

But do you know who is often the Minister's most harshest critic? The minister...

Did I do it right? Did I say the right words? What could I have done to make this person understand? How could I have done it better????

Now, when I have questions like that, I'm sure that some of you will be very willing to fill me in....

But you know, Paul said to the Corinthians, "I'm not going to be judged by you lot." I'm not even going to judge myself..." Oh, it's obvious he's examining his life all the time, because he says "I'm not aware of anything I've done wrong... But even **that** doesn't acquit me." It is the Lord who will judge me. Not me, and not you... You see, a person can be righteous in his own eyes, but God sees things as they really are.

Nothing is hidden from the Lord. He sees everything. He knows everything. He'll shed the light on everything that's hidden... And so therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes...

Now, that doesn't at all mean, that we shouldn't be discerning, and we'll get to that over the next few weeks, but he's using a legal term – don't **pronounce judgment**. Don't declare the verdict, that someone is "guilty" – It's not our place to do it. Who am I to judge someone else's servant?

Righto:

Now, this is where it gets interesting: Last week and so far this week, we've heard a fair bit about the responsibility that ministers/teachers have, as they minister and as they teach. We will be judged by what we do and by what we say... And I hope I didn't turn any young, aspiring ministers/teachers off last week... I hope nobody felt, "The burden is too great". "I don't want to ever be in the position where what I share with others has eternal consequences"....

But you **can** see the logic of it, can't you? You do understand how and why, teachers will be held accountable by God, right?????

You get it???

I'm pretty sure the Corinthian church, when they read this, they would have gone "Yep, those apostles/ministers, they're going to be held accountable alright – they're going to get their due."

But now Paul turns the tables on them, and he tells them what he's been doing all along...

When I first began learning to preach, a very wise minister said to me, “Don’t preach at your congregation. Preach at yourself.” Don’t use the word “You”. Use the word “We” or “I” ...

And particularly, when there is a very difficult or hard lesson, and when the word of God is particularly cutting, direct it at yourself, and let the Spirit of God, tell your hearers that it’s for them as well...

And so for example, last week, when the passage talked about destroying the church, I said “If a person has been set apart for God, as part of his holy church (no matter how imperfect they may seem to me), if I destroy that person, or if I destroy a church,,,,, God will destroy me...”

What did you learn from that? Did you learn “Michael’s walking on thin ice.” “He’s going to have to pay dearly for what he’s done”... Or, did the Holy Spirit, move you to examine yourself? Did the Holy Spirit tell you, that this is for you too?

When I gave that same message at Begonia in the afternoon, just as you guys had opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the Bible reading after the message, they actually took me up on it, and we had a really good discussion...

And one person said “But aren’t we all teachers at some level? Every time, even just sharing our faith with our children, isn’t that teaching???...” You see, they got it... Yeah. We are. And that’s why we colour inside the lines – we don’t go drawing our own picture... And we’ll come to that shortly.

But Paul said to them, “I’ve been applying all this to me and Apollos. But it’s really about you.” The things that Paul had to say to the Leaders in the Corinthian church, **were so hard, and so cutting**, that he applied them to himself... And that’s the irony – the Corinthian leaders would’ve gone “Yeah, you’re accountable Paul.”... not realising the whole time that they were wagging the finger at themselves...

I keep saying “The Corinthians”, but from the letter, it seems pretty clear, it’s “certain leaders” of the Corinthian church. They were behaving in an un-Christ-like way, and their teaching had gone way off track... , which is why Paul said: **not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another.**

*Alright, so when that person at Begonia said “Aren’t we **all** teachers at some level? – even when we just share our faith with our children...” “Is this a warning for us too???”*

Yeah it is... So how can we guard against going off track with what we teach???

It’s easy – Don’t go beyond what’s written. Colour, inside of the lines – don’t go drawing your own picture.

Where the Scriptures are clear on an issue, teach it to your children with every confidence.

But you know what? Some of the biggest disasters I’ve seen, with divisions churches, is where people take a stand, even when the Scriptures aren’t 100% clear. **Or**, they twist the

Scriptures so that (in their mind), the Scriptures agree with their own position. Or they just take 1 or 2 isolated verses, and construct a whole theology, without taking into account what the Scriptures as a whole say about it...

So, if you want to be confident that you are teaching correctly, don't go beyond what is written; Don't ever take a hard-line stand on a debatable issue; Don't puff yourself up in a fit of self-righteous zeal, and destroy your brother or sister in the process...

And we have to realise this works both ways. Some people have a natural tendency to legalism. Some have a natural tendency to do whatever feels good. So don't go beyond what is written in either of these:

- Don't go beyond what is written, if I'm looking to justify (for myself) certain 'freedoms'; and
- Don't go beyond what is written, if I'm looking to condemn some sin in the church...; and
- Don't go beyond what is written, when we're defining what we do or don't believe.

So, a good example of this, would be "teaching of the end times". Many people have very different views on what to expect in the lead-up to when Jesus returns. Why do we have such divergent views? It's because God hasn't given us all the answers. He doesn't want us to know all the answers. And yet churches have divided over this very issue. They've gone beyond what is written... And they take the attitude: "If you don't believe this, you're not welcome in this church."

Righto:

This next bit, we Australians shouldn't have too much trouble 'getting it'. Why? Because we're really good at sarcasm: You thought godly men were above sarcasm, didn't you??? (well they're not). It's right here in the Bible.

⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! ⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

You know, sometimes we think of pastors/ministers, as people who couldn't make it in the real world... And I have a confession to make: In the past, I have thought of certain ministers as, "They're just in it for the money – they couldn't get a better job elsewhere." ...

But in reality, **most** ministers I know, are men who had ‘good jobs’; they were highly respected in their profession; they were destined for promotion.... They were people on the path to success, but then God said to them, “Leave behind what the **world** counts as “success”. I’m calling you to the ministry as your vocation.”

And from that moment, they’ve entered a life of sacrifice, like they’ve never known before...

And there may be somebody here today, who God is calling, to leave behind what the world counts as “success”, because God is calling you, to be a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God...

But here’s this Corinthian church. Their leaders were so ‘puffed up’... “We can do it better without you.”.... “Look how well things are going for us.”... “**You** think we’ve gone off track, but see how successful we are...”

And by the world’s standards, everything **was** going well for them... You know, a lot of Christians have the attitude, “If it’s of God, it’ll be easy – it’ll be a success.” “And if it’s not of God, it’ll be hardship.” That was the attitude of the leaders in the Corinthian church, but that attitude is so wrong.

Paul was living the example that the Corinthians should be following. It’s not only ministers who are called to live a life of sacrifice – **anyone** who would follow Christ, is called to the way of the cross...

You know, when the leaders of a church get puffed up, often they begin to see the minister as “their servant”, instead of being “Christ’s servant”... In V12 there, it says:

- “When insulted or abused”, we bless.
- “When persecuted”, we endure
- “When slandered” or when “bad things are said about us”, we entreat or we encourage

And sadly, for a minister, way too often, the insults; the persecution; the slander,, well, it comes from **within** the church. And “puffed-up” leaders expect that the minister should just take it... And the thing is, they do. Not because they’re weak, but because they’re strong. Not because they are servants of the church, but because they’re servants of Christ, and they are demonstrating the example of Christ.

Righto:

Paul’s saying some really hard things to this church, but he’s not saying it because he’s bitter. It’s because he has a pastor’s heart. He says: ¹⁴ **I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish [warn] you as my beloved children.**

This, is biblical pastoral care at its best. You know, some people have the idea that pastoral care:

- is to go and visit the person;
- listen to everything they have to say;
- affirm them that they are in the right;
- pray that things will work out as they hope; and
- bless them as you leave...

That's not pastoral care. At least, it's not Biblical pastoral care. Paul is "admonishing" them (he is warning them), as a parent warns their child.

If a child was to swear at their teacher, what would you think of that child's parent if they just patted their child on the head and said, "He's learning how to express himself."

And yet, isn't it hard (maybe we think it's condescending), if a pastor was to warn; or correct; or to discipline those within his care... How we take that correction, says a lot about ourselves – Whether we're spiritual, or whether we're "puffed up" with self-righteous arrogance.

Paul had a very special relationship with this church, and can't you sense his hurt? He planted that church; He introduced them to Christ... And while they've got countless guides, they don't have many fathers...

So, in V18 he says something that not many ministers would ever say: **¹⁶ I urge you, then, be imitators of me.**

Does that mean he's perfect? Of course not... But what he's saying is, "Don't be arrogant. Don't be puffed up. Don't act as if you're the source of all knowledge, and everybody else is inferior..."

You see, Paul has been modelling for them, the way of the cross – the way of self-sacrifice – the way of Christ... And so, he was urging them, to imitate him in that...

And he's already tried to help them already. When he heard they were 'going off the rails', he sent a very trusted fellow missionary (Timothy) to try and sort them out – to remind them of what Paul teaches (in every church he goes to)... But that didn't achieve what Paul had hoped.

In Paul's absence, some of them were ruling the roost, and they thought that he wasn't ever going to make it back there again... But he assured them, that "I'm coming (God willing)." And what sort of a visit it would be, was really up to the Corinthians. You see, there's a time for a pastor to be gentle, and there's a time for him to take a firm stand.

And Paul says, "It's up to you. Am I going to come with a big stick? **or with love in a spirit of gentleness?**"

We've covered a lot of ground today.

How do I sum up chapter 4??? Our pastors/ministers, are servants of Christ. Are they perfect? Of course not. In chapter 3, we learned "Don't think too highly of them – Don't put them up on a pedestal." This week we learned, "Don't think too lowly of them"... "**We are not to judge them. God will be their judge.**"

But God is also **our** judge.

And so we shouldn't get all 'puffed up', in the attitude of "We've got it all sorted – we don't even need a teacher..." Or, in the view of, "The minister is our servant – he's there to serve us..." That's not the way of Christ...

The way of Christ, is the way of the cross – the way of self-sacrifice – the way of putting ourselves last, for the sake of the other. The Kingdom of God, isn't about “talk” – it's about the power of God... - the power for the weak to be strong; and the poor to be rich; and the servant to reign.

Questions?