

# A Picture of True Pastoral Ministry

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Oh, my dear friends, it's good to be together. It's good to be with you. It's good to sing with you. It's good to celebrate with you the triumphant truth, it being taught, passed on, sung, planted, boldly proclaimed in weakness around the world.

We want to continue to celebrate that triumphant truth this evening, so if you'd open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2.

I want to remind us of what Jeff spoke about this morning - that we're about to read God's word, and this word has particular relevance to this gathering because this is God's word about ministry. God's word about ministry. Let's read it with that expectation, that anticipation, that it would revive us, enlighten us, give us wisdom, be as much fine gold to us, sweeter than honey, and reform us in His image.

Let's read together, 1 Thessalonians 2:1:

## ***Paul's Ministry to the Thessalonians***

*2 For you yourselves know, brothers,<sup>1</sup> that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated in Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God <sup>p</sup>to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 <sup>s</sup>For we never came with words of flattery,<sup>2</sup> as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—<sup>t</sup>God is witness. 6 <sup>u</sup>Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, <sup>v</sup>though we could have made <sup>w</sup>demands as <sup>x</sup>apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God <sup>a</sup>but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.*

9 For you remember, brothers, **b**our labor and toil: we **c**worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and **d**God also, **e**how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11 For you know how, **f**like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and **g**charged **h**you to walk in a manner worthy of God, **i**who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 14 For you, brothers, **n**became imitators of **o**the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For **p**you suffered the same things from your own countrymen **q**as they did from the Jews,<sup>6</sup> 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and **s**the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and **t**oppose all mankind 16 **u**by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always **v**to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!<sup>7</sup>

### **Paul's Longing to See Them Again**

17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, **x**in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire **y**to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan **z**hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or **a**joy or crown of boasting **b**before our Lord Jesus at his **c**coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

Lord, bless the preaching and the believing and the obeying of Your word.

I received a old news article recently about a woman traveling in Iceland. No explanation for why she was traveling there on vacation, but she was traveling in Iceland. She was traveling with a tour, and after changing her clothes at a stop, she rejoined her tour group, but she was not recognized by any of them. After a while, a call went out to the group that a woman from the group had been lost with her description. The woman, not recognizing her own description, joined the search.

The search for the woman, with the woman, continued until 3:00 AM when finally someone, I don't know if it was the woman or not, realized that she was with the group all along. The search had continued because she and no one else recognized her from her own description.

Now, we have before us a description of true gospel ministry, a description of what true, authentic ministry, the character of that ministry, looks like. Paul is apparently defending himself from either current or eventual criticism and what he chooses to do in this passage is to point out the character or the nature, the conduct of his ministry as a demonstration that it is authentic, that it is true, that God's true minister can be discerned. He can be recognized by the conduct, the character of his ministry, so he provides this description.

Now, obviously, none of us has Paul's authority. We all know that, but nothing here speaks of authority. There's nothing here about his ability to write scripture or to command the church authoritatively. Actually, everything here has relevance throughout the ages because the same logic is true for us as it was for Paul. The character of gospel ministry reveals its authenticity. God's true ministry can be discerned. One way he can be discerned is that his ministry reflects this description.

Let me ask you to imagine something for a moment. If this description was posted among all Christians: "Needed - A pastor that looks like this", where we will find such a man? I know where I would find it. I would go to your church. I would go to your churches, the nearest one, and I would say, "He's here. He's here."

Now, if there are preachers here, they're aware that I just gave away the main point of this illustration. I could've asked the question and let it sound on you with a conviction. Where is such a man? Where is he to be found? But I don't want to do that. I want to start with encouraging you because the answer you would all say, "Not in my church. Not in my church. I look in the mirror, I don't see anything." I know you would say that. I want to say, "Oh, yes, you do. Yes, you do." I should have the right to speak this because I've been encouraged by this kind of pastor for 30 plus years, and so I can say, "I know where there are pastors that look like that. They're right here."

I know where there are pastors that are bold, living for God's glory and not the glory of men, who teach the truth without error. I know where those pastors are. Of course, they're not only in Sovereign Grace Churches. There are many other godly pastors, but I also know that they are in Sovereign Grace Churches. If I was looking for this person, I would say, "Let me take you to the nearest Sovereign Grace Church, and let me point out the pastors, and in many cases, the leaders and their wives." They will reflect in their own roles this picture as well.

I don't want this message, as we walk through this, to be perceived as some sort of correction or concern or burden. "You got to look more like Paul." No, I want you to be encouraged because I have seen, for 30 years, pastors that look like this. From a child perspective, I can say, "Pastors, yes, they look like this." From a teenage perspective, "Yes, they look like this." From an early young pastoral intern perspective, "Yes, they look like this." Now leading my own church, yes, I can look around at pastors and say, "Yes, they look like this."

That being said, we must continue as we have begun. We must continue to adorn the gospel that we've been entrusted, the doctrine we've been given with the character of our ministry. It must still be true years and years from now, if somebody would've raised their hand and said, "I'm looking for someone that looks like this. Do you know of anyone?" If they could say, "Yes, I do, I know that their ministry is authentic because I can point to them and say, 'I recognize authentic gospel character in their ministry.'"

I want that to be true of us for decades to come.

I'm also aware that as social pressures increase, at least in the West, and as Sovereign Grace ages, that the pressure to conform the character of our ministry to the spirit of the age will press upon us. It will press upon us even as Jeff communicated, "The triumph of the truth needs to be carried, and in the providence of God, it will ultimately be carried by pastors whose character adorns their message." Even now, the definition of pastoral ministry is in flux as people seek to respond to changing times.

One voice demands an increase in pastoral empathy. Another voice says empathy is sinful. One voice prioritizes sharp language. Another voice prioritizes soft language. There's the local pastor asking, "What am I supposed to sound like and look like? Am I supposed to look different to meet the needs of this different age?" In those kinds of moments, we have to return to the picture in the word that we've been given and to Paul and to let the Bible describe what we should look like so that it continues to be the case in our churches, that God's true ministers are revealed, are recognized in the character of their ministry.

I want to walk through this passage. Paul, as he always does, is overlapping and tripping over himself describing this scenario, this picture. I want to give four categories that Paul gives here and then some general observations for us as Sovereign Grace pastors and leaders. Four categories that describe the true minister that Paul is depicting here.

**First, this true minister is bold in God's service.**

Verses 1 and 2, he is bold in God's service, particularly in the face of suffering. Notice this in verse 1, he says, "*You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.*" That word vain probably refers more to the content of Paul's ministry. Though it could also refer to the outcome, but the content being - it's not a vanity. It's not a nothingness that I came to you with. I came to you with something authentic, real, genuine, valuable, legitimate.

Here's how you can know that. He says, "Our coming to you is not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel in the midst of much conflict." Paul's point in calling to mind the atrocious treatment in Philippi and then the outrageous mob in Thessalonica is to say that boldness in the face of suffering reveals the genuineness of our ministry. The genuineness of our ministry is revealed because only such a genuine minister would be willing to be bold in spite of that atrocious treatment.

Paul had just been beaten in Philippi, thrown in jail, treated without rights as a Roman citizen, and yet what does he do? He plants a church! And he's saying, "How do you know what I'm saying to you is to be believed, is to be trusted? How can you contradict those who might be discrediting us? Well, I'll tell you one reason: we're bold even in the face of suffering." Is that the mark of a deceiver or a charlatan? Paul would say, "No, it is not." That's one way you can tell the authenticity is that those guys are bold even in the face of suffering.

Now, we need to remember this so that, as CJ preached to us, we don't let our afflictions cause us to toss in the towel. Quite the contrary, it causes us to plant a flag - because we want to be known as authentically bold ministers of the genuine gospel the way that Paul was. Not for our sake, but so the gospel can be demonstrated as something genuine and real, not a vanity.

I was reminded, thinking about this mark, of gospel authenticity, of a man named Samuel Whittemore Jr. The Legend of Samuel Whittemore, a soldier in the Revolutionary War - it seems to approach legend, I would describe it as a legend - one account of his battle goes this way...When he was near 80 years old, Whittemore was in the field when he spotted an approaching enemy relief brigade sent to assist the retreat. Whittemore loaded his musket and ambushed the British grenadiers (sorry Dave) of the 47th Regiment afoot from behind a nearby stone wall, killing one soldier. He then drew his dueling pistols, killed a second grenadier, and mortally wounded a third.

By the time Whittemore had fired his third shot, a detachment of the enemy had reached his position. Whittemore drew his sword and attacked. He was

subsequently shot in the face, bayoneted numerous times, and left for dead in a pool of blood. He was found, the legend continues, by friendly forces trying to load his musket to resume the fight. Isn't that how you want to go out? He was shot in the face! It said half of his face - he didn't have it for the rest of his life. He bore the scar, but when they found him, he's trying to load his musket to get back into it.

"I've only been bayoneted 13 times. Let me keep going."

That's like Paul.

That's what gospel ministers look like.

They went back in the fight. They can get shot in the face. They *do* get shot in the face, don't they?

Harsh emails in the West - Bullets and actual slaughter in other parts of the world...

Don't we feel wimpy with our international brothers and sisters around here, troubled by emails? I'm not quite sure our brothers in Nepal would feel great sympathy when we express our worst email story.

"Oh, I got one that can top that. One time, this guy wrote to me - you'll never guess what he said."

You can see them just smiling and nodding.

"Oh, I'll get back to you. I've got to rescue a brother from jail."

Paul was beaten. He was in jail singing, not losing heart. He travels up the road. He doesn't stop, he just plants again. He has early favor. The mob is envious. They drag his friends to court. He's rushed out of town. What does he do? He keeps preaching.

What is a mark of authentic gospel ministry? It is boldness.

Here's the overarching point: We want to look like biblical pastors, and biblical ministry is bold.

It is bold in the face of suffering. That's what we want to be.

F.F. Bruce says this about Paul.

*"The scars which those experiences left, he wears with pride. They were the indelible stigmata which proclaimed him to be the bond slave of the Lord."*

Paul would say, "Oh, you want to see my mark of slavery? Oh, I got it right here. I got it right here. I got it right here. I belong to the Lord. I'm a true minister of the Lord. Look, I can prove it. Here's where they beat me here. Here's where they beat me here. I'm a true servant of the Lord."

Not because he cares how people think of him, he wants to demonstrate that only a true gospel could produce that kind of boldness in the face of suffering. He wants them to see so that they are steadfast in their own clinging to the gospel and to the doctrines that support that gospel. He is bold in God's service.

### **Second mark. Second mark, he is pure in God's sight.**

There is more in verse 3 and 4 that we can look at in detail, but let's do a quick overview. Paul says in verse 3 and 4 that, "Our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, rather, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts." He continues, "We never came with words of flattery nor with a pretext for greed." Here, God comes in again. "God is witness. We did not seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could've made demands as apostles of Christ, but we were gentle among you."

To give just overall summary, he's saying, "We were pure in our teaching and pure in our motives. Our teaching was pure. It didn't come from error. I wasn't deceiving you. There wasn't impurity. I wasn't seeking to lead you astray. There was truthfulness in what we communicated to you. It was not error. I am not a charlatan. I am telling you the truth. The pure doctrine was delivered to you.

"I am able to communicate that in the sight of God so that God is bearing witness to the authenticity of my message. God has approved. The word is tested. He has evaluated ongoingly the accuracy of my message. God tests my message, and so I entrust the evaluation of it to him. Before God, I am saying I speak the truth to you.

"My motive is pure because I'm not trying to please you. I'm not trying to flatter you. I'm not trying to gain your applause or approval, nor am I trying to do that for anyone else. Not only do I not want your approval, I don't want your money. I'm not looking to gain wealth from you. Again, God is witness. I

didn't seek glory from people. That's not the motive of this ministry. I'm not trying to lord it over you, rather, I am gentle or," as I think the word could be translated, "like an infant among you." His point is, "We are not impostors. We speak God's truth in God's sight, and what we say and why we say it is pure."

God's true ministers must be revealed, authenticated by the character of their ministry. Boldness and purity of speech and of heart reveal the authentic minister. It's not just a professional job to do whatever you can to gain a hearing. That's exactly Paul's point. We are not that way. That's how you know we are true and not false. You can trust what we say because we say it in the sight of God. What we say is true, and why we say it is for God's glory. This is the truthfulness of our message. This is the truthfulness of our heart in our message. Therefore, this ministry is genuine. This is the character of our ministry.

Now, brothers, what about us? We have to have the same purity of ministry, the same purity of our words and our content. Don't miss the overwhelming emphasis on the observation of God, who leans over the preacher to see that what he is saying is accurate to God's word, and gazes at his heart to see that his motives are true and pure.

Listen, we must be vigilant such that we could say the same thing. Not that we are perfect. Of course, we are not perfect, but when we see error in our content or our heart, we are quick in the fear of the Lord to reform ourselves and say, "Yes, Lord, I am aware you are watching, and I want to be able to say that, as God is my witness, I have spoken the truth as it is in Jesus, and my heart is pure before him," so that we in our ministry adorn and reveal that we are God's true pastors.

A genuine ministry must be pure in God's sight, pure in teaching, pure in heart. There must be no deceit either by commission or by omission in our teaching. I find that deceit by omission is much more dangerous for most pastors. Deceit by omission, impurity by omission.

We know what deceit by omission is because our children are born great at it. Deceit by omission. "Did you hit your brother?" "No." "Why is he screaming?" "I have no idea. I did not hit him. I did not hit him. I did not. I did not." "He seems very upset. Is there anything else that might possibly have contributed?" "Well, I did throw the ball at his face, but I wasn't lying because I didn't hit him, and if you read the footnotes of our previous conversation, you'll know that you asked me if I hit him, and I did not. Therefore, I am truthful."

Pastors do the same thing. One pastor wants to speak of the lordship of Christ over all of life in every nation but leaves out that the Lord has called us exiles in this present age, waiting for a kingdom to come. One pastor wants to speak of the love and compassion of Christ but leaves out that our identity and purpose and gender are defined by God. Maybe these truths aren't left out, they're just given less volume. One truth gets a loud speaker, and the other truth gets a footnote. Brothers, don't make the hard truths footnotes. Don't make the hard truths footnotes. It's deceit by omission.

What about our motives? It's important to notice, I think that Paul just rolls quickly from the purity of his message to the purity of his motives. We might think these are two independent categories, but they are connected. There is a reason why people drift from doctrine, as Jeff warned us about, there's a reason. They don't do it randomly. They do it because of the craving of another audience besides God. There's a connection of the drift of doctrine and the drift of motive to the approval of people that we have to be conscious of and vigilant about.

This happened to me. I'm preparing this message, and as I'm thinking about it, randomly, I was interrupted by an imaginary conversation with a particular person walking up to me in my mind and saying, "What a great message," before I preached it. As I'm evaluating this future conversation, the spirit of God broke in and said, "There it is. There it is. Why are you doing this?" Well, apparently, part of me is doing this because I want that person to be impressed.

Lord, forgive my impure motives!

Let me speak as to please God and not men, even good men. Let me speak as to please God. Keep us, Lord, from the treacherous snare of a people-pleasing ministry in our words or in our heart.

Charles Bridges, in his outstanding chapter, *The Fear of Man*, says it this way,

*"Subjects uncongenial to the taste and habits of influential men in our congregation are passed by or held back from their just and offensive prominence, or touched with the tenderest scrupulosity, or expanded with wide and undefined generalities so that the sermons, like letters put into the post office without a direction, are addressed to no one. No one owns them. No one feels any personal interest in their contents. Thus a ministry under this deteriorating influence chiefly deals in general truths devoid of particular application."*

Don't you see that temptation in our preaching, in our counseling?

Brothers, I often find it is sometimes easier to preach hard truths than it is to communicate hard truths across the counseling table. We must be bold in both contexts. Oh, easy to preach about complementarianism from the pulpit. Hard to say it across the table.

In both contexts, we have to be aware of this tendency where the tough things are held back, touched on with the tenderest scrupulosity. Five thousand caveats buried under cautionary protection languages, wrapped in bubbles and duct tape lest there might possibly be a misunderstanding. Tenderest scrupulosity about the hard things or generalities that everybody, every Christian and probably a lot of Buddhist could nod out and say, "Oh, that's very good. I appreciate that. Amen."

Bridges quotes Scott as saying,

*"Here I find my own deficiency. Often, I feel an inward timidity when about to preach upon an unpopular doctrine. In every instance, I feel the greatest reluctancy--"*

Listen to this. Search your heart on this.

*"I feel the greatest reluctancy to resign the good opinion or act contrary to the judgments of those for whom I have esteem."*

Now, I actually find it's not difficult to preach boldly towards those for whom you have no esteem. I find that to be quite-- It's pleasant because often you're surrounded by people-- You're surrounded by people that mutually disesteem said person, and they approve your critique of that other person and applaud your courage for speaking to someone who is not in the room and never will be. It's difficult, though, to say the hard thing when the person that you esteem might stop esteeming you if you say it.

Paul was willing to say the hard things without reference to his human esteem at all. As one approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, with God as witness, Paul's whole mentality is the audience of one, the one gospel, the one gaze, such that he wants to please God, and he's indifferent to the offenses that might be caused as he goes about pleasing that one.

Let's go back to our image. Is there a pastor, bold and pure? I pray there is.

### **Third mark. Is there a pastor that is loving towards God's people? Loving toward God's people.**

It's remarkable that the apostle who is bold in the face of suffering and is indifferent to the opinions of man does not view with indifference the people he is preaching to. He is not just bold, he is not just fearless, he is-- Notice the phrase, "We were like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. We were affectionately desirous of you. We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us."

Brothers, it is possible to think only of one part of this passage and not others. We need to be pressed by the entirety of the passage as well as all the other passages that speak to pastoral character in ministry. Here's this incredible image that a masculine man like Paul that can bear a beating with rods, thrown in jail, unintimidated by centurion soldiers, willing to go to death for Christ, can describe himself, especially in that culture, as a nursing mother with children who wants to give not just nourishing content to them, but so great is his affection for them, that he wants to give himself to them.

There couldn't be a more tender, gentle, sweet, feminine description of this element of his ministry. He's like a nursing mother taking care of her own children with affectionate desires for their wellbeing, their good for them. He wants to give them not just the truth as if he's just a conveyor belt operator, loading truth into the mouths of his hearers. No, he wants to care for them. He wants to give himself to them. What is the character that reflects God's minister? What does it include? A love, a gentle, tender, self-giving love for God's people. A truth speaker, yes. Pure in a heart, yes. Bold and fearless, yes. Tender beyond imagination, he is loving towards God's people.

In gospel ministry, there is a temptation to gradually become a mere transmitter of truth, perhaps even to remain a powerful exponent of the word and yet hold ourselves back from our people.

Now, to do that would be to deny the very word we are preaching or more likely to start being selective about the text we preach that lean away from those that describe the actual love of God. To give a message, it requires great effort, but to give the heart requires great risk. God's true servant doesn't just give the word. He doesn't give less than the word, but he doesn't just give the word, he gives himself.

To love means tying yourself to the spiritual fortunes of another, not just to stand above them with pronouncements or aloof from them with warnings, but

among them with affection. Now, this type of affection is not optional for the God word pastor. Just as the boldness and the purity are not, this kind of love is necessary precisely because the pastor represents God and Christ, and they describe themselves in motherly terms towards their dear children. If God created motherhood in parts to give some reflection of the depth of His self-sacrificing and tender care, then surely pastors ought to give that same kind of tender care for their people.

Let no cold professional pastor be found in a Sovereign Grace Church, known for his style of preaching, even for his ministry leadership, but not for his warmth of affection, tender as a mother. We must recognize some semblance of ourselves in this picture lest we be found or our people be found wandering off in search of someone who ought to be right next to them.

Notice this love is not merely emotional or hypothetical. Paul goes on to say that they can remember his constant labor, seeking to work day and night, not to be a burden on any of them. Probably revealing that he took up a physical job even as he preached the word to them. Now, keep it straight. Paul is not dividing his time and working because he wants extra money for himself. This is not his preference. He'd rather just be unmuzzled preaching the gospel, but in this scenario, he deemed this best for the church as an example for their lives. He's willing to work and sacrifice his rights and preferences just as a mother would for her children.

As a quick aside, if we don't uphold the unique role of mothers, then metaphors like this make no sense. Why does he do this? Well, because the character of his ministry reveals him to be the servant of the Lord, the true minister of his God. Like the Savior, he preaches he is willing to be spent for their souls. Brothers, one of the hardest thing about loving people is loving them after we have been shot in the face by them. How hard to not give into a cynical ministry that, for a while, accurately teaches truth but holds the heart and self back from people because of a risk that you'll get slapped again? Yet Paul is like a mother, so should we be.

Last mark, he is devoted to God's glory. Notice verses 10 to 12, he reminds them they had seen these things. "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. You know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Once again, Paul says his righteousness of conduct was evident to his people. He was determined that they would follow his example and exhorted them to righteousness of conduct as well because not just the pastor's character ought to adorn the gospel, but every Christians' character ought to adorn the gospel also.

Charles Spurgeon says,

*"True and genuine piety is necessary as the first indispensable requisite. Whatever call a man may pretend to have, if he is not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry."*

I thank God for the emphasis on holiness that the founding generation of Sovereign Grace handed down to us. The emphasis on applicational preaching, the emphasis on obedience and holiness in personal life and marriages, parenting and home, and application and sanctification because it's reflected here. Paul says a true pastor is righteous before his people, and calls them to righteousness as well, to adorn the doctrine that he preaches, to display it as being truly the doctrine of God.

Spurgeon again says,

*"The life of the preacher should be a magnet to draw men to Christ."*

It is sad indeed when it keeps them from him. Sanctity in ministers is a loud call to sinners to repent.

Brothers and sisters, I know we're not perfect, but let's give attention such that the volume of our own holiness is a loud call for sinners to repent. When allied with holy cheerfulness, it becomes wondrously attractive.

Let us have a joyful holiness of ministry in Sovereign Grace. A joyful holiness of ministry and ministers. Not a slavish holiness, fearing God's judgment and living in constant trepidation lest God could cast us out. No, a joyful holiness that is wondrously magnetic for our people. Let us not be those who are gospel exclusive, such that we preach a crucified and justifying Messiah, who has no implications for our righteousness of life. No, let us preach the Lord and Savior who saves us from our sins and delivers us from the power of sin, and let that deliverance be seen in the righteous life of the pastor lived before his people so that they are drawn like a magnet to that righteousness as well.

What's the overarching point of all of these marks? Any one of which could be a study on its own. The character of our ministry reveals us to be God's true

pastors. The nature of it, the boldness of it, purity, love of it, the righteousness of it, it reveals us. It authenticates us. It demonstrates our credentials as God's true ministers. We've been entrusted with the gospel. Therefore, we have to preach it with boldness and purity and love and righteousness, all adorning that message of Christ and Him crucified.

A couple of more general observations, and I'll close. Brothers and sisters, all of these marks and not just our favorite should be true of Sovereign Grace pastors. All of these marks and not just our favorite. We don't want to be like a pastoral description of one of those caricatures they do at Disney World - the dude with a massive forehead with a huge, long neck.

The massive ears of a caricature, think of that in pastoral terms. "Boldness, boldness, boldness." "Are you loving?" "Ah, not exactly." "Purity of content, purity of content." "Are you righteous in your life?" "I don't know. I don't think about that very much."

It shouldn't be that our members are having to squint to see this description in their pastor. I mean, he kind of looks like that. He's definitely bold like that. I'm not sure I describe him as a mother.

He's very gentle, bold, fearless, courageous...uncorrupted message? Sometimes.

One of the risks I think we face in this moment of social pressures and shifting convictional ground is to pick a part of the ministry that we like and to accent that and neglect the other. It's usually the part we're good at.

Brothers, let them quickly recognize us, not perfectly, but quickly recognize, "Oh, yes, that's my pastor." We all have preferences and gifts in ministry, but the need of the hour is not for half-pastors.

### **Second general observation... Paul's God and gospel are ours.**

The same God who transformed him from blasphemer to this picture is at work in us. We are bolding God's power, as he was. We present God's one gospel, as he did. We minister content with God's approval alone, as he did. We await the coming Kingdom of God and the glory, as did he.

Gordon Fee says,

*"One should note the thoroughly theocentric character of the entire passage. Christ is mentioned but once, while God is mentioned by name nine times."*

Paul understands his calling and apostleship to be the work of God the Father in his life. Hence the entire passage is all about something God has done. God, who made Paul into this, can make us look something like this.

It's not about in your strength or your ability or your energy or your creativity, somehow looking a little bit more like Paul, still worse, trying to search after some modern, fluctuating, drifting, ambiguous definition of ministry and trying to conform yourself every couple of years into that caricature. It's about believing that the God who was Paul's God is at work today and that in His true ministers, He will reveal the character of authentic ministry in our churches so that the same gospel goes forth.

Listen, the triumph of the truth is a certainty. The church will shake the gates of hell, but we want to be those who carry that truth. If we would, we better be looking like this, so let's look like this so we can be on the train of the unstoppable truth of God looking like those whose character demonstrates them to be the authentic bearers of that gospel.

Let me close with a prayer of Spurgeon that I am praying will be true to the end of their days for the first pastors of Sovereign Grace - not all of you are 80 yet.

Don't stop adorning the gospel till you see Him. Give us the gift of finishing well. To my brothers, who are getting older, do not redefine pastoral ministry. Hand down this picture in living color to the men coming.

Young pastors, here is what you are to be like. Take this prayer as a prayer for our future.

I pray that every one of you may be able to say with the apostle of the Gentiles that your ministry is not of man, neither by man, but that you have received it of the Lord. In you, may that ancient promise be fulfilled: "I will give them pastors according to mine heart. I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them."

May the Lord Himself fulfill in your several persons His own declaration, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls of Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day or night."

May you take forth the precious from the vile and so be as God's mouth. May the Lord make manifest by you the savor of the knowledge of Jesus in every place and make you unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. Having a priceless treasure in earthen vessels, may

the excellency of the divine power rest upon you and so may you both glorify God and clear yourself from the blood of all men. As the Lord Jesus went up to the mound and called to Him whom He would and then sent them forth to preach, even so may He select you, call you upward to commune with Himself and send you forth as His elect servants to bless both the church and the world.

Father, by Your Holy Spirit, fulfill that prayer among us. May we adorn this gospel treasure with our character and our ministry until You return. Guard us from any distortion of Your truth or the calling You have given us, and fill us with Your spirit to be a part of and carrying forward the triumph of Your truth so that Your unstoppable church would bring You glory. In Jesus name, amen.