In Colossians chapter one the apostle Paul expresses his prayerful desire for the Christians in the ancient city of Colossae. The heart of his prayer for them was that they learn to live as God wanted them to live—that they might walk worthy of the Lord. In order to do that, they needed to understand what God has done for them through the work of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:9–2:3

This chapter describes the great privileges provided for us by a great Savior. Yet none of us fully lives up to what we are in Christ. Although we are, indeed, holy before God due to Jesus redeeming us and reconciling us to God—paying the price for the forgiveness of our sin, we still have a long way to go before our practice matches our position in Christ.

It is for that reason that God saw fit to use certain people to minister his truth to fellow travelers. Among those servants were the apostles. It is specifically to the apostolic office that Paul refers when he tells us in verse twenty-three that he was appointed to serve as an apostolic minister of the gospel. Although there was no provision made for apostolic succession of office after the original apostles were gone, God did provide for another similar office that would be ongoing: the pastor of a local church. The pastor does not wield the same authority as the apostle, yet those two offices share a common goal: to help God’s people learn to be what they are—to live as God wants them to live.

It is the pastoral office with which we are concerned today as we recognize God’s choice to use Ron’s ministry and abilities as a pastor of a local church. We do nothing magical or sacerdotal when we later this afternoon lay hands on Ron. We are rather recognizing God’s sovereign choice to use Ron in a particular ministry.

Not everyone has been so appointed. Although God uses every Christian to minister in some way in and through the local church, it is God’s sovereign choice to bless the work of some in the preaching and teaching of his Word. For God to so use someone in that way requires considerable preparation,
study, and training. That, Ron has accomplished with distinction, not only at Baptist Bible Seminary, but also in his graduate studies at Detroit Baptist Seminary and at Buffalo University. He has had the benefit of better and more extensive training than many pastors. But the study does not stop once Ron finally stops going to school. The formal academic work is only the beginning. Those of us who have had Ron in the classroom have not taught Ron everything he needs to know. No one can do that. Seminary only helps a young man establish a solid foundation and gives him the tools for a lifetime of continued study and ministry of the Word of God to God’s people and for God’s people.

Although he will often be in your midst as he ministers, and likely one day in the midst of another local church, he will also spend many solitary hours in his study. To do so is not the sign of a recluse or of someone who cannot minister to or relate to ordinary people. It is rather the essential preparation for effective ministry to people.

He will have, I hope (!), a sign on his door that says not “Pastor’s Office,” but rather “Pastor’s Study.” Too often these days some people seem to have a conception of pastoral ministry that more closely resembles the CEO of a business than that of the pastor/teacher/shepherd. Yes, there is some administration involved in pastoral ministry, but the heart of ministry is the proclamation of God’s Word, whether from the pulpit in the formal preaching services of the church, or in a less formal classroom setting, or in the informal conversation in the foyer, parking lot, or living room. All of them absolutely and irreplaceably require that the pastor has spent much time in his study, wrestling with God’s Word to be sure he understands exactly what Scripture says and how that is best communicated to God’s people so that they understand what God wants them to know and how that truth affects their everyday lives.

That perspective on pastoral ministry is not just my idea—that is the portrait of pastoral ministry in the New Testament, sometimes explicitly, other times implicitly. You will find that portrait in the passage that we read a few minutes ago. Look with me at what Paul says about ministry in verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine. There are four key aspects of ministry in these verses.

**First, notice the subject of our ministry.** Verse twenty-eight begins in the middle of sentence: “whom we preach.” Since that phrase refers to preaching,
we know that we are talking about ministry, but to whom does the “whom” refer? Whom or what does the pastor preach?

A lot of preaching these days is about how to get along with people, how to raise your kids, be successful in life, how to deal with depression—all (perhaps!) valid topics in one sense, but too many pulpits today have overdosed on people-centered issues to the neglect of God himself. As a result we have an anthropocentric focus in our churches.

That was not Paul’s focus. Paul’s preaching—as should be Ron’s and that of every other pastor who stands behind the sacred desk and proclaims God’s truth—Paul’s preaching was profoundly Christ-centered. The “whom” of verse twenty-eight refers us back to verse twenty-seven: it is Jesus Christ whom we preach, the glorious riches of Christ in you, the hope of glory. This entire chapter has been focused on Jesus Christ. He has redeemed us, forgiven our sins, created the universe, reconciled us to God, and become the head of the church. Ron, it is that Christo-centric focus which must always be the subject of your ministry. All the hours that you spend in your study will never exhaust the riches of your subject. There is always more to learn of Christ.

Second, consider the object of our ministry. If our ministry of preaching must first focus on Jesus Christ as the subject, what is the object of that ministry? To whom do we preach Christ? Look once again at verse twenty-eight. “Whom we preach, warning…” whom? “Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom.” That gives you a fairly broad audience! Your ministry is to admonish and teach everyone, not just a select few. It covers the entire age range from the cradle to the nursing home. It crosses socio-economic levels: rich and poor, whether their collar is blue or white. They may have only a grade school education, vo-tech training, a college degree, or a PhD. Farmer, baker, factory worker, doctor, nurse, ditch digger, teacher, secretary, soldier, homemaker, or engineer. There is no caste system in God’s church, so the pastor must minister to everyone. And that in itself takes much time—both in the homes of those varied people so you understand their struggles and needs, and much time in the study as you grapple with how to communicate the ontological trinity, genitive absolutes, the transcendental argument, and dispensational premillennialism to the people whom God has entrusted to your care. It does no good to understand the intricacies of theology, grammar, and hermeneutics if you cannot use those very valid topics of study to touch the lives of ordinary people. Ministry
involves admonishing and teaching everyone—and that means getting the cookies on a shelf where everyone can reach them. When you preach, Ron, you will not use the technical terms that I just listed. Nor will you use Greek and Hebrew in the pulpit. As important and necessary as they are in the study, that is where the technicalities stay. Instead you will learn to communicate the truth those terms describe in the language of ordinary people.

Third, what is the goal of our ministry? We preach Christ to everyone, but why? What are we trying to accomplish? Look at your Bible once again, particularly at the end of verse twenty-eight. We preach Christ to everyone “in order that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” The goal—the purpose of our preaching is the maturity of every Christian. We admonish and teach everyone so that that can come to be more like their Savior. “Perfect” does not imply sinless perfection in this life. It is rather a growing, developing process here in which the “Christ in you,” verse twenty-seven, increasingly becomes the “Christ living out through you”—our lives gradually but steadily coming to look more like his life.

Most of us struggle with that process in our life. The pastor is no exception. “Reverend” or “Pastor” on the front of a name does not transport anyone to the magical land of maturity where there is never again any problem with sin. Pastor and people grow together in maturity, and one of the most crucial means of that growth is the pastor’s ministry of the Word, both to his own life and also to the lives of his people. Striving toward that goal once again points to the importance of the pastor’s time in the study alone with God’s Word, learning, growing, praying, maturing in his own life so that he can also teach his people what he himself has first learned.

That sort of goal seems—or at least ought to seem—to be an awesome task. To preach the whole counsel of God and all the riches of Christ in such a way that everyone will move towards maturity in Christ is a responsibility for which none of us are adequate, for which no seminary degree can possibly prepare you. If our mission of producing mature disciples were dependent on our strengths and abilities, the task would be hopeless indeed. But the good news is that God enables that for which we in ourselves are inadequate. Verse twenty-nine describes God’s provisions and enablement for ministry:

“Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.”
The fourth thing I want you to see in this passage is that the enablement for our ministry is nothing less than God’s own power working in and through us. Towards the goal of Christian maturity, God’s minister strives with God’s energy which works powerfully in him. Exactly how that works I cannot tell you, but you will sense that enablement when the burdens and cares of ministry are the greatest—when you have one of those draining weeks that take more time, more patience, more love, more wisdom, and more prayer than usual. Thankfully, every week is not like that, but when you feel most inadequate in yourself, most overburdened with the challenges, remember Paul’s confidence in God’s enablement.