

The Suffering and the Glory: Pastoral Ministry in Union with Christ

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In this essay I hope to present a pastoral theology that is also a practical, Trinitarian and gospel-driven theology. In delineating the doctrinal dimensions of gospel ministry, I take as my starting point the apostolic aspiration of Philippians 3:10-11—familiar words that can be found on the sanctuary walls of Philadelphia’s Tenth Presbyterian Church: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” My thesis is that pastoral ministry is exercised in union with Christ, both in his humiliation and in his exaltation.

The Doctrine of Union with Christ

There should be little question as to the importance of the doctrine of union with Christ. Being connected to Christ is one of the central concerns of the New Testament. Over and over again, including in this very passage, the apostle Paul emphasizes the necessity of being found “in Christ” (Phil. 3:9)—of sharing in his death and resurrection by dying and rising in him. He emphasizes this because it is in Christ that all of salvation’s blessings are located: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3). This vital unitive relationship virtually comprehends our salvation: we are saved in Christ. It also summarizes the Christian life: the life that we now live is a new life in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Given the consistent biblical emphasis on being in Christ, the doctrine of union with Christ properly occupies a central place in systematic theology and provides the context for our whole experience in the Christian life. To be united to Christ is to be connected to him at all points in his saving activity on our behalf. We were predestined and elected in Christ. On the basis of our union with him we are justified, and through his Spirit we are adopted and sanctified. It is in Christ that we persevere, and it is into his image that one day we will be glorified. Therefore, as John Murray has written, “Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. . . . It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect.”

Without beginning and without end, every aspect of salvation is wrapped up in union with Christ, the central dogmatic principle that unites the several doctrines of evangelical soteriology.

Union with Christ was a prominent theme in the theology of the Reformers. To give the most notable example, it served as one of the organizing principles for Calvin’s *Institutes*. “We must understand,” wrote Calvin, “that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. . . . All that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.”

Calvin went on to teach that it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ by faith. There is a double bond. By the faith the Spirit provides, we bind ourselves to Christ; by his Spirit, Christ binds us to himself, and thereby “makes us participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself.”

This experiential union with Christ finds its ultimate basis in the incarnation and also in the “wonderful exchange” whereby Christ was pleased to “present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God’s righteous judgment, and in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had

deserved.”

Many later theologians adopted Calvin’s emphasis on union and communion with Christ. The doctrine exercised a formative influence on the theology of the Puritans, some of whom considered union with Christ the conduit for all spiritual life and the fountainhead of every spiritual blessing.

This is how the Puritan John Preston described the experiential aspect of the doctrine: “There is an union made between Christ and us, when he comes into the heart, when he dwells in us and we in him; when Christ is so brought into our hearts, that he lives there, and when we are so united to him, that we live in him; when he grows in us, as the Vine in the branches; and we grow in him, as the branches in the Vine: when faith hath done this, then it is an effectual faith, when it knits and unites us to Christ.”

Clearly, union with Christ is not a matter of sterile speculation. On the contrary, it pulses with the heartbeat of genuine piety—a heart of faith joined to the Savior of love. As the Old Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander insisted, “If Christ be in us there will be communion. . . . He will sometimes speak to us—He will speak comfortably to us—He will give tokens of his love. He will invite our confidence and will shed abroad his love in our hearts. And if Christ be formed within us we cannot remain altogether ignorant of his presence. Our hearts, while he communes with us, will sometimes burn within us.”

I Want to Know Christ

When the Puritans considered the work of Christ, they often made a distinction between his humiliation and his exaltation. *Humiliation* was the work of Christ in suffering and dying for sin. According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, it “consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time” (A. 27). *Exaltation* is the work of Christ in conquering sin and death through his resurrection and ascension. To quote again from the *Shorter Catechism*, this consisted “in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day” (A. 28). **Note when**

These two aspects of Christ’s work—humiliation and exaltation—are clearly in view in Philippians 3:10-11, which mentions both the sufferings and the glories of Christ. I take the *kais* in verse 10 as *exegetical*. In other words, what follows serves to explain what Paul meant by knowing Christ. Sharing in Christ’s sufferings is not something distinct from knowing Christ. To know Christ *is* to share in his crucifixion and resurrection. Paul wanted the kind of “fellowship with Christ, or union with him, in which all that Christ had done for him in his life, death, resurrection and ascension was brought into his life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

Earlier in Philippians the apostle traced the trajectory of Christ’s work, the grand parabola of redemption that swept from equality with God down to the obedience of crucifixion, and then back up to the highest place (Phil. 2:5-11). In order to accomplish salvation, God the Son went from glory to glory by way of the cross. The apostle looked at all that and said now *that’s* the Jesus that I want to know in my own personal experience: the Christ who suffered, died, and rose again. To put this in the categories of systematic theology, he wanted to be united to Christ in both his humiliation and exaltation.

In order to attain this knowledge of Christ, it was necessary for Paul to declare spiritual bankruptcy. All the things he formerly had counted as assets—his ethnic heritage, his educational background, his ecclesiastical pedigree, his ethical standards—all of these things had to be written off as liabilities (Phil. 3:4-7). Furthermore, compared to the superlative joy of knowing Christ, Paul calculated that his religious achievements added up to nothing more than a filthy pile of refuse (*skubala*; Phil. 3:8). The best thing, the most valuable thing, the surpassingly great

thing was to know Christ and to be found in him. Paul gave up everything else to be united to Jesus Christ, receiving in him salvation by faith.

Now the apostle's burning and passionate desire was "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). In one sense, this is a very surprising declaration, for if anyone knew Christ already, it would have to be the apostle Paul. He had known Christ for decades, ever since he met him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Already in verse 8 he had testified to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. But knowing Christ only made Paul want to know him all the more. He wanted to become ever more closely identified with the crucified and glorified Christ.

Paul's aspiration to know Christ in his humiliation and exaltation usually is taken as a general comment on the Christian life. That is to say, as we live in Christ we are conformed to the realities of the cross and the empty tomb. But what the apostle says about being united to Christ in suffering and glory should also be considered from the vantage point of Christian ministry. Paul was writing these words not simply as a Christian, but also as a minister of the gospel. It was in his ministry—more than anywhere else—that God would satisfy his desire to be humiliated and exalted with Christ. Like everything else in the Christian life, the ministry of word and sacrament is exercised in union with Christ. In order to proclaim Christ, the minister must know Christ in *both* his crucifixion and resurrection. The doctrine of union with Christ thus provides the paradigm for a theology of pastoral ministry.

Becoming Like Him in His Death

To follow the pattern of Christ's own ministry, in which the cross came before the crown, we must begin with the sufferings of the ministry. First the suffering, then the glory. Pastoral ministry is not a matter of life and death, but a matter of death, then life: "we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:17; cf. 1 Pet. 4:13). And Philippians 3:10-11 leads us to expect pastoral ministry to contain both suffering and glory. As Stu Webber has written, "The pastor who is most Christlike is not the one who is most gloriously fulfilled in every moment of his ministry, but the one whose ministry has in it unbelievable elements of crucifixion."

It takes a crucified preacher to preach a crucified Christ. Do you believe this? The biblical history of gospel proclamation is primarily a story of suffering. Few of the biblical preachers were successful, at least by any worldly standard. And for every success there seem to be dozens of failures and flameouts. For every man who turned the nation back to God, many others were mocked and persecuted, some so severely that they were tempted to leave the ministry, or even to despair of life itself. God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute" (Luke 11:49).

Consider the Old Testament prophets. Their call narratives make for inspiring reading; however, what most of them were called to do was to suffer. Samuel heard God's voice in the night, yet the message he received made his ears tingle with fear: judgment on Eli, his father in the faith (1 Sam. 3:11-14). Jeremiah was assured that God would always be with him, but at the same time he was informed that the entire nation—all the people, priests, and politicians—would fight against him (Jer. 1:17-19). The story of Isaiah's call is the most inspiring of all, with its thrilling response: "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa. 6:8). But what was Isaiah sent to do? God said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:9-10). From the outset, Isaiah's preaching ministry was doomed to fail. Its purpose was not to help people come to faith, but to confirm them in their unbelief!

Many prophets faced rebellion from God's people. The supreme example is Moses, who had people grumbling about his leadership style from the very beginning of his ministry. They

complained about their meal plan (Exod. 15:24; 16:3). They refused to follow instructions (Exod. 16:20, 27). They accused him of attempted homicide (Exod. 17:3). They even tried to stone him (Exod. 17:4). And when Moses was ready to lead them to the Promised Land, they refused to go.

Other prophets suffered persecution. One was Elijah, who in many ways was the most successful prophet in the Old Testament. Elijah saw fire come down from heaven. He watched the people fall down in the dust to worship Israel's God, and then he killed hundreds of false prophets (1 Kings 19:38-40). But the next day he was afraid of his enemies and ran for his life. Elijah's discouragement led to depression so deep that he begged God to take his life (1 Kings 19:3-4). Or consider Jeremiah, who had such a difficult ministry that the ancient rabbis called him "the Weeping Prophet." Jeremiah was tormented by false prophets (Jer. 14:14). He was beaten, imprisoned, and left to die (Jer. 20:1-6; 38:13). He was mocked for being God's servant (Jer. 20:7-10). When he interceded for God's people, his prayers went unanswered (Jer. 15:1). Then at the end of his life he saw the city he loved surrounded and destroyed, while the people he loved suffered and died in the streets (Jer. 14:17-18; Lam. 1—5). It is little wonder that Jeremiah once cursed the day he was born (Jer. 10:14-18).

Even this brief survey shows how the Old Testament prophets anticipated the sufferings of Christ. The New Testament says that they suffered "disgrace for the sake of Christ" (Heb. 11:26). To say this another way, they suffered in union with Christ, which is why Jesus was able to prove the necessity of his humiliation from what they endured. "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" he asked his disciples on the road to Emmaus. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27; cf. 1 Pet. 1:11). Jesus suffered many indignities at the hands of the evil men who plotted to have him killed. At various times he was accused of illegitimacy, ignorance, insanity, and even demonic influence. Eventually he was unlawfully arrested, unfairly tried, unjustly convicted, and unmercifully beaten. But he endured his greatest sufferings on the cross, where he died a God-forsaken death. His crucifixion was the apotheosis of the humiliation suffered by his prophets (see Luke 11:47-51). As Stephen said in his challenge to the Sanhedrin, "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him" (Acts 7:52-53).

Remarkably, at the time of his death Jesus had virtually nothing to show for his ministry. Nearly everyone had rejected him. He had relatively few followers to begin with, but at the end he had only eleven, and even they abandoned him. His ministry turned out to be no more successful than Isaiah's. People were forever hearing Jesus, but never understanding him; forever seeing his miracles, but not perceiving his message (Matt. 13:13-15; cf. Isa. 6:9-10). And the Man of Sorrows suffered for this. "O unbelieving generation," he groaned, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19). The lament of this Suffering Servant was previously recorded in the book of Isaiah: "He [God] said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.' But I said, 'I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing'" (Isa. 49:3-4a). At the time of his death, the preaching ministry of Jesus Christ could hardly be judged anything except a failure. The main thing it seemed to accomplish was getting him killed.

And what of his followers? What happened to them? Think of the original disciples. According to the best historical records, nearly every one of them died a violent death. Or think of Stephen, who as far as Scripture records, preached only one great sermon before being stoned. These men suffered all these things because they were united to Jesus Christ in his sufferings and death.

The one who endured the most excruciating torment was the apostle Paul. When Paul first came to Christ, God showed him how much he would suffer for the sake of the gospel (Acts 9:16). And suffer he did. Paul faced trouble, hardship, and distress. He was frequently imprisoned and often on the run—in danger by land and by sea. He was whipped, beaten, stoned,

and left for dead (2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-27). “To this very hour,” he wrote, “we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. . . . Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (1 Cor. 4:11, 13b). Then there were all the sufferings he experienced in ministry: his anguish for lost souls (Rom. 9:1-5), his ceaseless spiritual concern for the church (2 Cor. 11:28-29), his tearful entreaties with Christians who were struggling to follow Christ (Acts 20:31). All of which means that Paul’s prayers were answered: in the context of gospel ministry, he became like Christ in his death.

The Fellowship of Sharing in His Sufferings

What does this litany of misery teach about pastoral ministry? Obviously it teaches that a call to pastoral ministry is not to be trifled with. One night at bedtime I read my four-year-old son the story of Stephen. I explained that God’s servants often suffer for speaking God’s Word, and that sometimes they are even killed. “Are they going to kill you, Daddy?” my son asked, his eyes open wide. “I hope not!” I answered, but given the biblical history, it was a fair question.

Any minister who knows his Bible can hardly expect to escape suffering—specifically suffering for the cause of Christ. Martin Luther wrote: “Those who are in the teaching office should teach with the greatest faithfulness and expect no other remuneration than to be killed by the world, trampled under foot, and despised by their own. . . . [T]each purely and faithfully, and in all you do expect not glory but dishonor and contempt, not wealth but poverty, violence, prison, death, and every danger.”

Some, especially those who enjoy the comforts of Western civilization, may object that Luther’s view of gospel ministry is unduly negative. No doubt it was colored by the unique difficulties of his time and place. However, an authentic pastoral theology must be adequate to the task of ministry under conditions of the most extreme hardship, such as many ministers suffer today in many parts of the world. The truth is that being united to Christ in the ministry of his gospel always involves conflict within the church and some measure of opposition from without. Inevitably there will be unfair criticisms, unfortunate misunderstandings, unfounded rumors, and unjust accusations. These hardships cannot be avoided; they are to be expected. It is simply a fact: “the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives” (2 Cor. 1:5). Pastoral ministry could not be in union with Christ unless it entailed difficulty, discouragement, and even death.

Nevertheless, many ministers are surprised by suffering. Perhaps this is one reason why some ministers become discouraged and unproductive, or even leave the ministry altogether. Often there has been a failure to grasp the implications of pastoral ministry in union with Christ. The words of Thomas a Kempis are striking for their contemporary relevance: “Jesus today has many who love his heavenly kingdom, but few who carry his cross; many who yearn for comfort, few who long for distress. Plenty of people he finds to share his banquet, few to share his fast. Everyone desires to take part in his rejoicing, but few are willing to suffer anything for his sake. There are many that follow Jesus as far as the breaking of bread, few as far as drinking the cup of suffering; many that revere his miracles, few that follow him in the indignity of the cross.”

How rare it is—especially in America—to find a minister who desires fellowship with Christ if it includes sharing in his sufferings. Such a minister is able not simply to endure difficulty, but actually to embrace it. And the trials of pastoral ministry are to be embraced, for Paul said, “I *want* to know Christ, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” Here the emphasis is on knowing Christ, but that knowledge is specifically placed in the context of sharing in Christ’s humiliation. This perspective flies in the face of the career goals of the average pastor. Indeed, Paul’s statement is one that all too few ministers would be able to make honestly and sincerely. A willingness to suffer with Christ cannot come from the human nature, but only from God’s Spirit.

In his epistles, the apostle Paul often reflected on the role of suffering in gospel ministry. One of the striking things about these reflections is his manifest joy in suffering for the cause of

Christ. “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you,” he wrote in Colossians 1:24. Or to the Corinthians: “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties” (2 Cor. 12:10). Paul really *did* want to know Christ in the fellowship of his sufferings! He was like the apostles in Jerusalem, who left the Sanhedrin “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

There were two reasons for Paul’s readiness to share in Christ’s sufferings. One was his belief that these sufferings were necessary for the evangelization of the lost. The world could not understand the message of the cross unless those who preached it were themselves marked by its suffering and shame. This is the meaning—at least in part—of Paul’s enigmatic claim, “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24). This verse has little or nothing to do with the extent of the atonement, but everything to do with missions and evangelism. What is still lacking is the communication of the gospel by a suffering church. The unsaved people of the world cannot see Jesus hanging on the cross. What they can see is a community that shares in his sufferings, and thus confirms the truth of his passion. The sufferings of the apostles—and by implication, the sufferings of the church and its ministers—were public demonstrations of Christ and his cross. Paul thus described himself as part of a procession constantly being led out “to die in the arena” (1 Cor. 4:9) or to die for the honor of a conquering king (2 Cor. 2:14).

Sharing in suffering was at the very heart of his strategy for making known the crucified Christ: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10a). The other reason for Paul’s passion to know Christ in his sufferings is that such fellowship affords a deep, personal knowledge of Christ. This is one of the promised blessings of gospel ministry. As George Whitefield observed, “Ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross; the Spirit of Christ and of glory then rests upon them.”

Anyone who is in the pastorate inevitably faces one form of suffering or another, and in the fellowship of sharing Christ’s sufferings will enjoy the fruit of union and communion with him. In his Latin translation, Jerome rendered “the fellowship of his sufferings” as “the society of his passion.” It is during times of hardship and difficulty that the minister becomes a member of that intimate society, experiencing the closest possible identification with Christ. At the same time Christ makes the closest possible identification with his suffering ministers. Paul learned of this identification at the time of his conversion, when the Lord said to him, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8; cf. 9:5). In other words, the persecution of the church is tantamount to the persecution of Christ himself. Because he is united to his people, Christ regards every incarceration and abuse they endure as an assault on his own person.

All of this explains why Paul wanted so very badly for the humiliation of Christ to be worked out in his own life and ministry. What he desired was not the sufferings themselves, but the fellowship of sharing them with Christ. He reasoned that since he was a minister of the gospel, difficulties were bound to come. And when they came, it would be much better to experience them in union with Christ. Paul knew that hardship is woven into the fabric of every faithful pastoral ministry. It is not only to be expected, but also embraced as part of the minister’s communion with Christ. Suffering is one of God’s gifts; “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29).

Note also the “consolation” of suffering in putting to death sin and idolatry...

This does not mean that suffering needs to be sought out. It will come on its own, according to the will of God, in the manner and measure that he intends. It will come in all the sorrows a shepherd shares with his flock, and in all the burdens he bears on their behalf. He suffers most intensely of all in witnessing the destructive power of sin in the lives of people you love, and in the grief of their losses.

In the meantime, there are other ways for a minister to nurture his communion with the crucified Christ. The kind of spiritual intimacy that Paul sought comes not only from outward

suffering, but also inwardly from dying to self. This too is part of what it means to be united with Christ in his death, following the way of his cross in the mortification of personal sin. The minister must be able to say, with the apostles, “We do not preach ourselves” (2 Cor. 4:5a); “but we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23a). However, in order to preach this way, he must first be able to say, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

As one aspect of his union with Christ, the pastor must die to self in all its hideous forms: self-indulgence, self-aggrandizement, self-love, and self-will. He must be dead to pride, dead to financial gain, dead to people-pleasing, recognition and approval. All of this must be put to death—if a pastor is to know Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. The notable Scottish minister William Still (1911-1997) gave his spiritual autobiography the significant title *Dying to Live*. In it he wrote:

“The deaths one dies before ministry can be of long duration—it can be hours and days before we minister, before the resurrection experience of anointed preaching. And then there is another death afterwards, sometimes worse than the death before. From the moment that you stand there dead in Christ and dead to everything you are and have and ever shall be and have, every breath you breathe thereafter, every thought you think, every word you say and deed you do, must be done over the top of your own corpse or reaching over it in your preaching to others. Then it can only be Jesus that comes over and no one else. And I believe that every preacher must bear the mark of that death. Your life must be signed by the Cross, not just Christ’s Cross (there is really no other) but your cross in his Cross, your particular and unique cross that no one ever died—the cross that no one ever could die but you and you alone: your death in Christ’s death.”

The Power of His Resurrection

Paul had much to say about knowing Christ in his sufferings and death. However, he also understood that union with Christ entails exaltation. His ministry was, after all a *gospel* ministry—one grounded in the crucifixion *and* resurrection of Jesus Christ. So having consider the suffering, we must also consider the glory.

In Philippians 3:10-11—the summary statement for his theology of pastoral ministry—the apostle did not begin with suffering, but with glory: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). In this seems surprising, we need to remember how Paul first came to know Christ: not at the cross, but on the road to Damascus. Paul also ended with glory, hoping “somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:11). The word “somehow” does not indicate doubt, as if Paul lacked the certainty of his salvation. Elsewhere he is emphatic in the assurance of his eternal hope (e.g. Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Tim. 1:12). What he expresses in Philippians 3, therefore, is not so much doubt as amazement—amazement that God would raise a sinful man like him from the dead. And this is precisely what Paul wanted to know: God’s resurrection power.

What is the power of Christ’s resurrection? To be specific, it is the life-giving power of God the Holy Spirit. The Scripture teaches that “through the Spirit of holiness” Christ “was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). The Holy Spirit is the effective transforming agent of God’s resurrection power. This was true for Christ, and it remains true for the Christian. As Paul later wrote, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Rom. 8:11). The same Spirit who brought Jesus back to life also vitalizes and revitalizes the believer. To know the power of the resurrection, therefore, is to know the power of the Holy Spirit. When Paul asserted his desire to know Christ’s resurrection power, he was announcing his intention to live (and minister) by the power of God’s Spirit, which is the greatest power of all.

The resurrection gives power for gospel ministry. This was true in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It was not until Jesus was raised from the dead that his preaching achieved lasting effect. Prior to the resurrection, his followers remained uncertain of his identity and thus lacked the courage to live for his cause. It was only when Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Spirit that they came to a full understanding of his saving work.

Once the apostles believed in the risen Christ, they were commissioned to proclaim his saving message. That message was the good news of salvation for sinners through both the cross and the empty tomb. Thus the resurrection was partially and yet fundamentally constitutive of apostolic preaching. When Peter preached in Jerusalem, and when Paul preached in places like Pisidian Antioch, it was not simply the crucifixion, but also the resurrection that animated their presentation of the gospel (see Acts 2:24-32; 13:30-37; 17:31-32). Whenever the apostles preached, they said, “We are witnesses” (e.g. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 13:31), meaning eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

The resurrection was significant to the apostles for another reason as well. It was not simply the basis for their message, but it was also the source of their power. Their preaching came “in power and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5), for the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead was now at work in their ministry of his gospel. Jesus had ascended to glory, and from his place of exaltation he had sent his Spirit. This is why he had promised his disciples that by faith they would do even greater things than he had done (John 14:12): he was sending them by his Holy Spirit, so that the very power of his resurrection would be at work in their ministry. They preached with power because they were filled by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Acts 4:31; 9:20).

As we have seen, the ministry of the Old Testament prophets was marked primarily by humiliation. The same can be said of the ministry of Jesus Christ—up until the time of his death. It too was humiliating. But everything changed at the resurrection, and with the ascension, when the Spirit was unleashed in all his saving power. And now the ministry of the gospel reveals God’s power to save sinners. This ministry is not exercised without suffering; the “already/not yet” dynamic of redemptive history is evident in the pastorate as much as anywhere. But through the preaching of the risen Christ, the Spirit is inaugurating the glories of the coming age. Therefore, for the minister in union with Christ, there is exaltation as well as humiliation in the duties of our calling. This practical theology is not merely a theology of the cross, but also a theology of glory.

The resurrection power of the Holy Spirit is the source of any and all effective gospel ministry. First, the Holy Spirit has the power to regenerate (see John 3:5). Paul experienced this in his own conversion. When he met the risen Christ on the Damascus road, the light was so dazzling that he was blind for three days. But one of Christ’s ministers came and said to him, “Jesus . . . has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). As the scales fell away from Paul’s eyes, he was filled with the Spirit, and at once he began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20). Paul’s ministry of the gospel, in turn, led to the conversion of others. The same resurrection power was at work in his preaching, as it is in all preaching, to bring spiritual life from spiritual death. It is through the preaching of God’s Word that sinners receive eternal life by the Holy Spirit. Through the proclamation of a risen Savior, we are granted all the blessings of resurrection life.

The Holy Spirit also has the power to sanctify. Sanctification is not moral progress by self effort, as if it were a human achievement. Rather, sanctification is a living out of the implications of our union with Christ—what God has done for us in Christ. Paul had experienced this as well. He was growing in godliness, and it was partly on the basis of his own spiritual experience that he was able to write: “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6). So the life-giving Spirit is the holiness-producing Spirit—holiness grounded in resurrection.

Paul went on in the same passage to make it clear that the Spirit who sanctifies is also “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom. 8:11). Therefore, just as Christ relied on the Spirit for his own resurrection, so also the minister who is united to Christ relies on the Spirit to animate the dead with new spiritual life. This is the power that delivers people from their bondage to sexual sin, tears down proud idolatries, reconciles broken marriages, resolves church conflicts, and does all the other things in ministry that often seem impossible. So the minister prays, as Paul prayed, for God’s blessing on his ministry of God’s Word, through the powerful work of God’s Spirit: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know . . . his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:18-20). Another way to say this is that Paul wanted others to know what he knew: the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in a life of gospel holiness.

If it is to be effective, everything a minister does must be done in the resurrection power of the Spirit. When Paul announced that he wanted “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection,” he was asking for the sovereign work of God’s Spirit, who alone enables the various duties of pastoral ministry to fulfill their divinely-appointed purpose. It is the Spirit who answers pastoral prayer. It is the Spirit who transforms sinners through the private application of biblical teaching. It is the Spirit who makes baptism an effectual sign (**power/means**) of God’s saving grace. It is the Spirit who makes Christ present in the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper. It is the Spirit who enables us to interpret and apply God’s Word, and who blesses the public ministry of that Word by doing his saving and sanctifying work. Charles Spurgeon is reported to have mounted each of the fifteen steps of the Metropolitan Tabernacle pulpit saying, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

When he did this, Spurgeon was conducting his ministry in union with the Christ who is present in the church by his living Spirit. Marvelous to say, the power of the Spirit is at work not only in a minister’s evident successes, but also in his apparent failures. Here again the example is Paul, who, especially when he faced difficulty in ministry, was compelled to depend on the Holy Spirit. (**the two are connected!-- this is key to the power, never detached from the “putting to death” unto “newness of life”**) Paul did this in his preaching. He often preached “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling,” yet his message came “with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that (he explained to the Corinthians) your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:3-4). What was true of Paul’s preaching was true of his ministry generally. He informed his friends of the hardships he had faced in Asia: “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8-9). Nevertheless, God had a sovereign purpose in this experience of sharing in Christ’s sufferings. As Paul went on to testify, “This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). Notice again the way that Paul grounds his ministry in the gospel work of Jesus Christ, sharing in the power of his resurrection.

As he ministered in union with Christ, Paul experienced both humiliation and exaltation. And often it was humiliation that compelled him to rely more completely on the exalting power of God’s Spirit. The weakness he suffered served to demonstrate the glory of God’s grace. “Therefore,” he said, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10; cf. 4:7). Notice from these Scriptures how pervasively Paul viewed the suffering and the glory of his ministry from the vantage point of the cross and the empty tomb—his union with Christ. Paul’s sufferings in ministry strengthened his grasp on God’s resurrection power, so that he was able to say, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body” (2 Cor. 4:10-11). Or again, “He was

crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you" (2 Cor. 13:4).

These verses show that it was partly^{??}, **why not fully** through his suffering that Paul came to know Christ in the power of his resurrection. Christ has already suffered his humiliation and entered his exaltation. Now we are one step behind, still waiting to be exalted. It is of some encouragement to know, as we suffer, that Christ has passed this way before. But more than that, we now have the risen and exalted Christ to sustain and comfort us in our humiliation. Ultimately his resurrection will raise us beyond all suffering, but in the meantime we experience the power of his grace. This grace enables us to persevere.

Finally, the Holy Spirit has the power to glorify. Here it must be emphasized that many of the greatest glories of preaching are deferred benefits. This was true in the ministry of Christ. Earlier we noted the humiliation of the Suffering Servant, who said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing." Yet the Servant went on to declare his expectation of his coming exaltation: "What is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God" (Isa. 49:4). The same movement from suffering to glory occurs again in chapter 53: "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. . . . After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. . . . Therefore I will give him a portion among the great" (Isa. 53:10a, 11a, 12a).

The hope of deferred glory is of particular encouragement to pastor's who are discouraged by their apparent fruitlessness in gospel ministry. As it was for Christ, so it is for his ministers: exaltation comes only after humiliation. The gospel minister labors in his field with the hope of a harvest that will not be reaped until eternity, when his ministry of suffering will be transformed into a ministry of glory. The Puritan Richard Sibbes thus advised ministers to wait for the rewards of their ministry: "Let us commit the fame and credit, of what we are or do to God. *He will take care of that*, let us take care to be and to do as we should, and then *for noise and report*, let it be good or ill as God will send it. . . . Therefore let us labour to be good *in secret*. . . . We should be carried with the Spirit of God, and with a holy desire to serve God and our brethren, and to do all the good we can, and never care for the speeches of the world. . . . We'll have glory enough by-and-by."

Somewhere Charles Spurgeon made essentially the same point in more epigrammatic fashion: "Set small store by present rewards; be grateful for earnest by the way, but look for recompensing joy hereafter."

The apostle Paul was looking for that recompensing joy. His was a future-oriented definition of success in ministry. He did not think that he had fully grasped the knowledge of Christ, but still wanted to "press on toward the goal to win the prize" (Phil. 3:14). As he went on to write, "We eagerly await a Savior from there [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown!" (Phil. 3:20—4:1). Paul was trusting in the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, not only for his own glorification, but also for the glorification of the church. This is the ultimate goal and crowning glory of any preaching ministry: to present the elect unto God ready to receive their eternal inheritance. "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 1:19-20). The exaltation of a pastoral ministry, which is rarely glimpsed in this life, will only be fully displayed at the Second Coming, when God will reveal his Son in the risen church. When—somehow—we attain to that resurrection, we will know Christ's power to the fullest measure.