

Your Pastor Is Sufficient

Did you know that your pastor smells? Now, before your imaginations travel too far, let clarify what I just said. Every preacher of the gospel carries around with him the aroma of Christ. Listen to what Paul says: *"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."*

All of us are the aroma of Christ. But, in a public way, your pastor is too. Paul tells us in this verse that he has two distinct odors. Paul says: *"15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death;"*. We are the smell of death to unbelievers. Now, I don't know about you, but I remember the first time I was around death. We had just finished deer hunting. We took the deer to a shed. And there we slaughtered them. And I was amazed at how fast those animals could smell bad. We worked as quickly as we could to cut the meat off of the deer. Because the longer we stayed, the worse the animals smelled.

When you are around death, it smells horrible. And so, you want to get away from it. That's what your pastors are to so many in the world. When unbelievers hear the word "pastor", they smell death. They smell something so horrible that either the source of the smell has to leave, or they do. And what is the source of that smell? Jesus. They hate the smell because they hate Jesus.

Your pastor smells. He smells like death to unbelievers. But, to Christians, especially the Christians in his congregation, he is the smell of life. And what does life smell like? A couple of years ago we were hiking in Glacier Park, in Montana. And at the end of the hike was this amazing view. You could look out across a valley that was thousands of feet wide and thousands of feet deep and see a beautiful mountain, called Heaven's Peak. The pine trees and the wild flowers smelled wonderful. And the wind was crisp and clear. We had hiked up the mountain. But we didn't want to go back because it looked and smelled so wonderful.

And that is what Christ smells like to us. He is the smell of life. He is the smell that brought life to us. And, more than anything we want to be around him every week in church and every day in his word. And we want to be around our pastor. And there is where our sinful nature is very active. For, what is it that makes your pastor sufficient or worthy to serve you with God's word? Is it his hair or his smile? Is it his youth or is it his experience? Is it the number of people in the pews or the number of visits he makes during the week? What makes him sufficient is what he brings. He brings Christ and all of his forgiveness to you. But, in our sinful thoughts that isn't sufficient. We want a pastor who is younger or we want a pastor who is more experienced. We want a pastor who is out among his parishioners. We want a pastor who is in his office, studying God's word. We have all of these qualifications in our minds about what makes a pastor sufficient. But what does God's word say: *"16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?"*

What is it that makes a pastor worthy? Does your pastor share this gift of life with you? Does he share Jesus with you, so that you are given life, breath and strength through God's word? That is what makes your pastor sufficient to serve you. Notice what is not on the list. It's not what he looks like. It's not the people he brings, the money he brings in, or anything else we might imagine. It is a sin to cherry-pick what *we* think is important for a pastor when God's word is so very clear.

And, yet, Jesus cares deeply about our sins. He cares enough to send us pastors to shepherd us with God's word. He cares enough to send us pastors who baptize us, and through water and word make us children of God. He cares enough to send us pastors who give us the LORD'S Supper, and through bread and wine and Jesus' body and blood we receive forgiveness. He sends us pastors who teach and preach to us, driving that forgiveness deep into our hearts where our sinful nature can't twist it.

Your pastor is sufficient. He is sufficient because of the life he brings. But he is also sufficient for another reason. Paul tells us *"2Cor. 3:4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*

Your pastor is sufficient because he has confidence. And that leads us to an important question: In what is he confident? He is confident that the Holy Spirit works through his word. God's word is truth. And since it is the

truth, your pastor has the privilege and duty to use it faithfully. He has the duty to preach *law*. Paul says that the “letter” kills. What letters is Paul talking about? He’s talking about the ten commandments. If a pastor his doing his job faithfully, he will hurt you. Even better—he will kill you. He will show you your sin and put to death your sinful nature. He does this with God’s word. Do you remember what Jesus said about the fifth commandment? The fifth commandment is *Do not murder*. And we are tempted to think that we are not guilty of this sin. And then God’s word tells us “*1 John 3:15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.*”

Your pastor has the confidence to do what he has to with the law. He has the confidence that when he shows you your sin, it will hurt and it will kill your pride and the lies in your heart. But, that’s not all that your pastor has confidence in. Paul tells us: “*He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*”

Your pastor has confidence that the law will kill. And so, he faithfully uses it. But even more so, he has confidence that the gospel will give you life. And so, he tells you those same, comforting words again and again: “you are forgiven, Jesus kept the commandments you have broken, Jesus has risen from the dead.”

Your pastor is sufficient. He is sufficient to serve because of the life he brings. And he is also sufficient to serve because of the confidence he has in God’s word. With this in mind, I ask that you would pray. Pray for the Christian Churches across this land who have pastors who do not have the confidence we have. They do not have this sort of confidence, because they are in doubt as to what God’s word says. Pray that their pastors would grow in the truth. Pray for the pastor that you have. Pray that he would continue to use God’s word faithfully. And pray for yourselves. Pray that you would hold your pastor to God’s qualifications and not make up ones that are not in God’s word. And finally, pray that the words of truth you hear through the voice of your pastor may take root in your hearts and lives. Amen.