

What Happens in Healthy Churches

Colossians 1:28-29

Two things happen in healthy Churches no matter what era or culture they are in.

1. Proclamation--an ongoing, Christ-centered conversation that:
 - a. Admonishes—We challenge each other up to faith where we are just behaving instinctively.
 - b. Teaches—We provide each other with information and models for Spirit-filled living.
 - c. Is wise—We speak with precise words that address root issues, in a precise tone, at precisely the right time.
 - d. Is offered to everyone.
 - e. Is purposeful, inspiring maturity.

2. Toil—many giving it all, for Him to multiply, to gain credibility, relational equity, and opportunity to affect life change.
 - a. We embrace a struggle, enabled by His power, for minds and hearts. It is a prayerful struggle for right words, receptive hearts, and life change.
 - b. Our efforts focus on the objectives He is empowering us to achieve, rather than our own.

Pastor Bob Fox Personal Notes on Colossians

1:28—“And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

As Paul daily gave his body to doing his share to carry on the work of Christ (verse 24), these were the tasks he engaged himself in. His desire was to present every man complete or mature in Christ. Christ's suffering provided for Man's justification and the basis for his sanctification. Our sacrifice and work provides for people's progress toward maturity.

There is the proclamation of Him that must happen, of His identity as God and as sin-bearer, as coming king and judge. These are the recurring themes in the apostle's proclamation of Jesus Christ. People cannot believe in and grow in that which they have no familiarity with. There is then this work of proclamation or publicizing the news about Christ. The proclamation of Christ takes on a dual tone. It is good news of a cure that lifts burdens and brings joy and celebration. It is also a warning of eventual accountability to this One whose love is reaching out.

Proclamation involves two things—admonishing and teaching. In the grammar of this verse these two terms are participles that give definition to the idea of proclamation. So Paul wishes that the readers understand admonishment and teaching as two primary elements of proclamation.

Admonishment is the work of motivating people to make the decisions that will lead them to maturity. It is pushing them along to the highest ground they need to occupy. It is gentle yet confrontive. It focuses on what is true, not what one wishes was true or hopes is true or projects as true in themselves. Admonishment is encouragement, but not of the sort meant to simply make someone feel good about where they are or how far they have come. It is meant to compel them to take the next step, one that might be overdue. This work of admonishment, done in a loving, caring way is quite often the missing element in Christian fellowship. We are unable to occupy this middle ground, tending either to be vindictive and controlling, or soft and permissive. Either extreme can be uncaring. Admonishment begins with and is carried out with discernment. It perceives the realities of a person's life, their physical, emotion and spiritual stability and capacity to receive truth, and chooses the time, place, words, and tone that will bring about their progress in the faith. It means to place something in the mind of someone. That requires sensitivity and skill.

Then there is the work of teaching. Motivating people to action without instructing them in what they are to do will only frustrate and discourage them. There are always “how to's” in life skills, and there are the rational and logical reasons that underlie certain choices. Teaching focuses on bringing others to a point where they have learned the detail of what is true about spiritual matters. Its goal is action but action that is guided and shaped by precise understanding.

Admonishing and teaching were carried out by Paul “with all wisdom.” That is an important part of his thought here. The end he was aiming for was the maturity of the people of God. So his activity could not be mindless, clinical, or imprecise. There is no mass production process whereby raw material goes in one end of an assembly line and mature Christians accumulate at the end. It is certain that there are specific things that should happen by a certain time in one's experience with Christ. But that doesn't mean they will (Heb 5:12-16). So for any who lead this individualized work, wisdom is required. Now wisdom in the Scripture is always found where the

Spirit of God is listened to. And so Paul's words imply his dependence on the leadings of the Holy Spirit and His continual shaping of the moment at hand. The next verse will fully clarify that the work done must be done in accordance with this Person who is the great choreographer of all that God wishes to bring about in His creation. He allows us to do only what the Father is doing as Christ did (John 5:19).

The work Paul did was individualized and inclusive. It involved "every man" or every person. Paul felt a calling to enhance the spiritual welfare of everyone. His work was personal. He knew names and situations. He invested in individuals. I also knew the burden of the whole of the body of Christ. He sought to neglect neither.

1:29—"And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

Proclaiming and laboring were the two activities that occupied Paul's time. Proclaiming involves our words. Laboring refers to the effort we exert in making our lives credible and relevant to those we wish to impact. It describes all we do to live the message and to model it to others. The goal of our efforts is to bring people to maturity in Christ.

This purpose of bringing people to maturity is the grand one that should capture us all. After speaking in the previous verse about being a part of the company of those who embrace this purpose, Paul now speaks of his personal commitment to it. This is a signal to the readers of some significance. Sometimes it is possible to be a part of something which is so big that our individual effort lags. The entire movement has a momentum that we do not contribute to. We can get away with doing little or nothing. We are "hangers-on." We enjoy the company and being part of the success, but we make no real sacrifice to help move the load forward. This can be true of those at the entry level, but can also be true of us the higher up in the organization we move. The flesh can lead us to this thinking the more tenure we see ourselves as having and the more authority we have. Somehow we think we arrive at a point where we have "paid our dues." It behooves the leaders of any organization to ask, "Am I working hard doing the things that this movement needs to do or am I resting on my laurels?"

The other trap that spiritual leaders can fall into very easily is to not work according to His power. They work hard, but it is all human, fleshly effort. The difference between hard work done in the flesh and hard work done in the Spirit lies in the motives that drive it and in those motives it appeals to. It is not that one is less effort than the other. But what drives the effort of the one is the glory of God, and the heart of God. It is done because there is a strong sense He wants it done. The effort expended is great. But the spirits of those who do it are at peace. There is a certain spirit of rest in the air though intense labor might be going on. Work that is done in the flesh is for the glory of some person or persons. It is done to meet some need they have. A craving drives them and so vexation and frustration are their companions. They have never done enough. It is never big enough or good enough. Such work appeals to the flesh in others and they are attracted to the effort. In time there is an assemblage of those who have deceived themselves completely, laboring hard, investing years in that which is not God's heart at all. They experience little of His touch and so must invest even more of their own emotion. Eventually it all collapses under its own weight.

How much Church work and ministry falls into this latter category is hard to surmise. But each person who leads it must ponder what it really is that God wants done. Either way they will work

hard and exhaust themselves. That is certain. The question is will they experience God working mightily with them or in them. Are their efforts complimenting His, or is He absent from the labor?