

# A Ministry Aimed at Maturity

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:24-29

**Sermon Series:** *Colossians*

**Topic:** Suffering, Ministry, Calling



## **Colossians 1:24-29 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup>

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

## Introduction

As we continue making our way through Paul's letter to the Colossians, we now come to verses 24-29, in which Paul becomes very personal. He shares details about his life and ministry which he has not yet shared with the Colossians and he explains the purpose of his ministerial calling. In verse 28 he sums up the whole aim of his ministry, "...*that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*" Paul explains that his ministry entails suffering, but that he is willing to embrace the suffering because through it he is helping Christians mature in their faith. This passage is aimed at advancing your spiritual maturity. We all need to mature in our faith, no matter what age we are. May Paul's words nudge us forward and upward.

### To Those in Vocational Ministry

There are two spheres of application for this paragraph. The first sphere is among those who are already in or are considering going into vocational ministry. The second sphere is among all Christians in general. I can think of at least four and maybe five young men sitting among us this morning who are presently discerning if God is calling them into vocational (i.e. full time) Christian ministry. Paul would help you advance your ministerial maturity by teaching you three aspects of vocational ministry; 1) it entails suffering, 2) it involves explaining mysteries, and 3) it is primarily about proclaiming Jesus.

### To All Christians

For the rest of you, Paul would help you toward maturity by understanding that, 1) suffering is part of God's plan for our lives, 2) that the mystery of the Bible has personal application to you, and 3) that proclaiming Jesus is part of God's calling on your life too.

So we might say that Christian maturity comes through having a proper theology of suffering, rightly understanding the Bible and the mystery it contains, and personal proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. If you want to grow in maturity, then you need to think seriously about these three words.

## Minister = Servant

After explaining how Christians are *reconciled* to God in verses 21-23—through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross<sup>1</sup>, Paul transitions into an explanation of his '*ministry.*' The word '*minister*' is the key word that links the previous paragraph with this paragraph before us this morning (v.

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<sup>1</sup> Col. 1:22.

24-29). Minister is the final word in verse 23 and then you see it again in verse 25. The word in Greek is *diákonos* (διάκονος), which means “a person who renders service—‘servant.’”<sup>2</sup> It often refers to “the waiter at a meal” (Jn. 2:5, 9) or “the servant of a master” (Mt. 22:13).<sup>3</sup> From it we have our word ‘deacon.’<sup>4</sup>

Paul is describing himself as a *servant* of the gospel, of Christ, and of the church. Or another way of saying it is that he is a *minister* of the gospel, of Christ, and of the church. At the beginning of the letter he identified himself as an apostle, as one sent by Jesus. However, here, he simply identifies himself as a *servant*, a minister.

## A Ministry of Suffering

The first fact that Paul points to about his ministry is that it is a ministry of suffering. Strikingly Paul does not merely endure a ministry of suffering, he is able to rejoice.

### **Colossians 1:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake*, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

## Rejoicing in Suffering

What first catches our attention is that Paul is able to rejoice in his suffering. Paul uses this kind of language often.<sup>5</sup> The reason he is able to rejoice in his suffering is because he knows that *all suffering experienced by the child of God is not punitive<sup>6</sup>, but purposeful*. Paul knows that Jesus bore his punishment on the cross. Therefore, any suffering that he must endure is not because God is punishing him, but rather because God is working out some good purpose in his life. Paul can rejoice in his sufferings because he knows his suffering is serving a good purpose that is ordained by his sovereign Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 459.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “Διακονέω, Διακονία, Διάκονος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 88.

<sup>4</sup> Deacons in the church are those who serve the church in the most basic and helpful of ways, including serving tables, unlocking the doors, feeding those in need, etc. See Acts 6:2 where the verb form of the word is used, but is often translated ‘serve,’ as in to ‘serve tables.’

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 6:10; 7:4; Phil. 2:17.

<sup>6</sup> No suffering in the life of the Christian is punishment for our sins, since Jesus has already borne our punishment for our sins on His cross (Is. 53:5-6, 11-12; Rom. 3:23-26). The suffering Christians must endure is rather disciplinary, that is it is suffering aimed for the training and good of the person (Heb. 12:5-11).

Notice that he understands his sufferings to be “*for your sake*,” that is, his suffering was for the sake of the Christians in Colossae. Paul understood that his sufferings were for the benefit for the Colossians to whom he was writing. Two more times he points to a greater purpose in his suffering, “*for the sake of his body, the church*” (v.24) and Paul refers to his ministry as a “*stewardship from God.. given to him for you.*” Paul understood that part of God’s purpose for his life and ministry was that he endure suffering. When Jesus called Paul into the ministry He said,

**Acts 9:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> “... he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Jesus did not say this because he was angry at Paul and wanted to punish him. He said this because He had a purpose for Paul. *A proper, biblical theology of suffering must include the fact that God, in His omnipotent sovereignty, is able to effect good and holy results in the lives of his beloved children through suffering.*

**Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

God is sufficiently powerful and loving to use suffering as one of the means by which he works out His good purposes in the lives of the children He loves. He did this in the life of Jesus. Paul teaches us that knowing this truth is what of part allows him to rejoice in all his sufferings.

**Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> ... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame,

Christians can rejoice in suffering because God uses suffering as part of the process by which He produces hope in your lives. If you are a child of God you must expect suffering and not be surprised by it or faint under it. *All of God’s children will suffer for His name’s sake or else we are not His children.* If our Master and Savior had to endure suffering, then should we who are His servants think that we are greater than Him?<sup>7</sup> Remember what Jesus said, “*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.*”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jn. 15:20.

<sup>8</sup> Jn. 15:18.

**Romans 8:16-17 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Evidently some suffering is necessary in the lives of the children of God. *If you want to enjoy Christ's glory, then you must be willing to embrace Christ's suffering.* Suffering with Christ is necessary, therefore we should not be surprised when it happens. Teaching this truth was one of the chief truths for which Peter labored to help us know.

**1 Peter 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

**1 Peter 4:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

**1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

These verses clearly communicate that suffering is included in God's will for His Children. God does not work in the hearts of His children with haphazard, purposeless, random suffering. No. He works with willing intention and purposeful direction. He is always at work within the heart and soul of His children conforming them ever more to the image of Christ and creating Christ-like character within them.<sup>9</sup> This is why Paul was able to rejoice in the sufferings that he had to endure. He knew that God was working His purposes in and through the suffering he had to endure and he knew that his suffering would be to the benefit of others. The next phrase points this out.

## Filling Up What Is Lacking

The next phrase has been the source of much confusion and consternation. After stating that he was rejoicing in his sufferings for their sake, Paul then makes an astonishing statement which almost appears blasphemous.

**Colossians 1:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

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<sup>9</sup> Phil. 1:6; 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:18.

What on earth does this mean? In his flesh he was "*filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions?*" Is Paul saying that Christ's afflictions were somehow deficient? Is he saying that Christ's suffering and death on the cross is not enough to save us and must be supplemented? This is the interpretation embraced by the Catholic church and is part of the doctrine that supports the understanding of The Treasury of Merit.<sup>10</sup>

However, if Paul means that Jesus' sacrifice of suffering was insufficient to save us and atone for our sins, then there are at least three major problems. First, Paul would be contradicting what is elsewhere taught by all other New Testament (NT) authors. Second, he would be contradicting himself and what he has taught in all twelve of his other NT letters. But even worse, he would be contradicting what he had just written in the previous paragraph. Paul has, just a few sentences earlier, made the argument that Jesus has made perfect peace between God and man by shedding "*his blood on the cross*" (v.20) and then told the Colossians that because of His sacrifice they were now [fully] reconciled through "*the body of his flesh by his death*" (v.22). Paul gives no hint of any deficiency of Christ's sacrifice anywhere in this letter or in any other letter which he has written.

So, let's assume that he hasn't lost his mind in the span of time that it took him to write the last four verses and ask ourselves what else could he possibly mean? First, the context always helps to rightly interpret confusing verses. In the context, as we have already seen, Paul has three times pointed to the fact that his ministry and his suffering is for the benefit of others; 1) "*for your sake,*" i.e. the Colossians (v.24a), 2) "*for the sake of his body... the church*" (v.24c), and 3) "*...given to me for you*" (v.25). Assuming then that there is no lack in the atoning power and spiritual efficacy of Christ's offering of Himself on the cross, then what could be lacking?

It seems to me that the only thing lacking in Christ's afflictions for the Colossian Christians was the ability to see them with their own eyes. What's lacking for them is not effectual power, but rather visual manifestation. It's very hard to know and believe that something is real without seeing it. But Paul was filled with the Spirit of Jesus and Paul was living out Jesus' call upon his life, therefore Paul was like a living example to Colossians that what they had been taught about Jesus was actually true. Paul, "in his flesh, was filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions," namely as visible manifestation of them. They had not yet seen him face to face but Epaphras had and others they knew had and they could go visit him in jail if they so chose.

What is lacking in Christ's afflictions today is not their objective power, but rather their present manifestation. What is presently missing of Christ's afflictions for those currently alive today is to be able to witness the afflictions of Jesus. Many people today say, "I don't believe in the resurrection because because I can't see it. I don't believe Jesus suffered, died, and rose from the dead because I didn't see it with my own eyes. I don't believe Jesus is real because none

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 374.

of those who bear His name live like He lived. I don't believe having Jesus is better than having money because all the so-called 'Christians' I know appear to love money just as much as I do."

And yet if the Spirit of Christ dwells within His people, then we should be providing the world the evidence it lacks? If the world is to believe that the power of Jesus is real, ought they not be able to see His power manifested in the lives of those who are His followers? *If the world is to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, then should they not see him alive in us?* If the world is to believe that Jesus has the power to forgive sins and change lives, then should not our lives demonstrate the reality of that forgiveness and redemption to the watching world? If it is true that knowing Jesus is the greatest blessing and deepest joy in all the world, then the lives of those who know Him should not lack evidence to support that fact? If Jesus truly is our greatest treasure, then shouldn't how we Christians spend our money demonstrate that fact?

### Application for Vocational Ministers

You believers who are vocational ministers or who are thinking you might be, you too will be called to suffer for Christ in some way. If you would join Christ in His ministry, then you must be willing to join Him in His suffering. The purpose for the suffering is not because God hates you and wants to condemn you or because He gets His jollies off making your life miserable. He has called you to be a living example, before the eyes of the church to whom He will call you, of faithful, obedient, joyful living, during seasons of suffering so that they will know for a fact and believe with certainty that Jesus has risen from the dead and that He is worthy of all worship and loyalty.

### Application for Non-vocational Ministers

You believers who are not called into vocational ministry, you too will be called to suffer for Christ in some way. If you would join Him in His glory, then you must be willing to join Him in His suffering. The purpose for your suffering is not because God hates you, wants to condemn you, or gets His jollies off making your life miserable. He has called you to be a living example, before the eyes of your coworkers, colleagues, customers, friends, and family, of faithful, obedient, joyful living during seasons of suffering so that they will know for a fact and believe with certainty that Jesus has risen from the dead and that He is worthy of all worship and loyalty.

## A Ministry of Unfolding Mystery

The second fact that Paul describes about his ministry is that it is a ministry of unfolding mysteries.

### **Colossians 1:25-27 (ESV)**

...I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and

generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The second purpose of Paul's ministry is "*to make the word of God fully known*" (v.25c). God had called Paul to a ministry that was for the sake of others. In this case, it was for the sake of the Colossian Christians. The purpose of the "*stewardship given to him by God,*" was to fully expound and explain the word of God. God intended to use Paul to help people come to a more complete understanding of His word.

Exactly what was it that Paul was to "make fully known?" In verse 26, he says it was "*the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations, but has now been revealed to the saints.*" The word 'mystery' (*mystērion*) "is used in the NT of truth undiscoverable except by divine revelation."<sup>11</sup> An easy way to remember this is that, in a biblical context, mystery refers to "what God under the old covenant concealed, but by Christ in new covenant has revealed." It refers to something of God's plan that has previously not been understood, but now through Christ has been clearly known.

This mystery has been concealed by God for "*ages and generations,*" but now God has revealed it "*to the saints.*" The mystery Paul has been charged to explain had long been largely unknown by Israel, but now has been made know to the saints, that is, to the church, the people of God.

## Gentiles Included In God's Redemptive Plan

Paul explains what the mystery is. He mentions two aspects of it. The first aspect of the mystery, is the truth that God intends for "*the riches of His glory to made known among the Gentiles.*" The Gentiles are included in God's great redemptive plan for humanity. God intends to manifest His glory, not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles. God had, from the beginning, intended for the Gentiles to be saved. This truth was there in the OT, but somewhere along the way, the saliency of this fact was lost. For example, we can see it in Genesis where God said to Abraham,

### **Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> ...and in you all the families of the earth<sup>12</sup> shall be blessed."

In blessing Abraham God had planned to bless the Gentiles as well. The fact that God intended Gentiles to be part of His redemptive plan is there to be seen in the OT, but it was

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<sup>11</sup> Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 191.

<sup>12</sup> See Is. 51:5 where "coastlands" represent Gentile nations (cf. Is. 60:9).



never a notion that was front and center in the Jewish thinking and teaching. While there are examples of Gentiles being enfolded into the corporate life of Israel<sup>13</sup>, the primary notion was that in order to be saved one had to become a Jew.

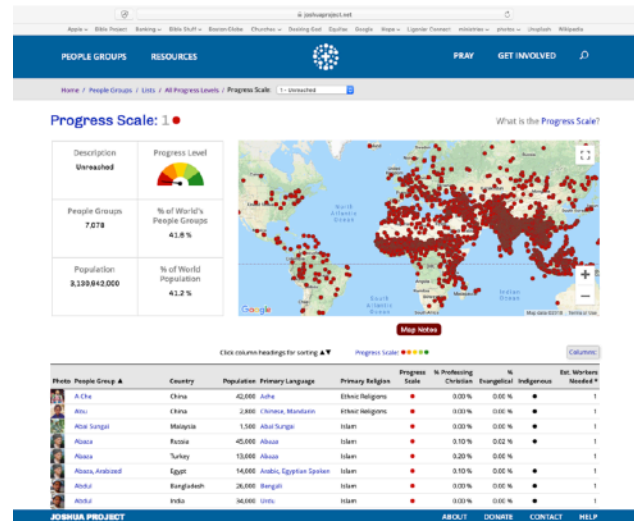
However, in Christ it becomes crystal clear that non-Jews are included in God’s plan of salvation. Before ascending into heaven Jesus commanded His disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth<sup>14</sup>, which obviously meant taking it to Gentiles. As the gospel went out from Jerusalem, after the ascension of Jesus, the Samaritans<sup>15</sup> believed in Jesus as messiah (Acts 8), the Gentile Cornelius (a Roman Centurion) and his family receive the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Peter (Acts 10), and after the conversion of Paul and through his ministry, the gospel exploded into Gentile regions. Taking the gospel to the Gentiles was part of Christ’s calling upon Paul’s life. Jesus said to Paul,

**Acts 26:17-18 (ESV)**

“...the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Through Paul, and Christ’s call on his life, the gospel broke into the wider Gentile regions and spread throughout the world. Facilitating the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles was part of Paul’s calling and contribution to the obedience of Christ’s command to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We need more people like Paul today. The command to take the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth remains unfinished. The Joshua Project, a research organization that tracks the progress of the gospel across the globe, reports that there are still 7,078 unreached<sup>16</sup> people groups, totaling around 3 billion persons. We need people, like Paul, who will leave their home country and take the gospel across cultures, ethnicity, and national borders. Perhaps some of you listening to my voice will hear God’s call and go. Completing this calling will cost some of



<sup>13</sup> There were Egyptians who came out of Egypt with Israel (Ex. 12:38), Naaman (2 Kg. 5:1-17), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kg. 17:8-20), Rahab (Josh. 6:25), and Ruth the Moabite.

<sup>14</sup> Mt. 28:18-20.

<sup>15</sup> Unclean, half-breeds in the mind of the Jews.

<sup>16</sup> An “unreached” people group has less than 2% of its population who identify as Christian and thus require outside assistance to take to gospel to remaining group population.

us our lives, but it will be through our suffering and our service that the nations will come to faith in Jesus.

There was a Masai<sup>17</sup> warrior named Joseph who attended an evangelistic conference and heard the gospel. When he heard of Jesus' death to pay for the sins of those who would trust in him, Joseph believed the gospel and surrendered his life to Christ. Immediately he knew he needed to share this good news with his home village. He went back to his village and preached the gospel to them. They mocked him and laughed at him. Then the men held him down and the women whipped him with barbed wire and then trough him out of the village. After a couple of days he awoke lying in the grass. Miraculously, he was still alive and had not been attacked by animals.

As he lay there recovering, he began to wonder why his people had not accepted the gospel that he preached. He assumed that he must he told it to them incorrectly. So he carefully went back over the gospel he had heard to make sure he didn't miss any details and then we went back to his village and preached the gospel again. Their response was the same. They beat him, whipped him with barbed wire, and threw him out of the village. He went back a third time but they attacked him before he could even open his mouth. However, he awoke he was not lying in the grass outside the village, but rather in his own bed, being cared for by some of the same people who before had tried to kill him. To his amazement, the whole village had come to faith in Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

Would you be willing to suffer like Joseph in order to see your town come to faith in Jesus?

## Christ In You the Hope of Glory

The second aspect of the mystery is found in the last phrase of verse 27.

### **Colossians 1:26-27 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.

The truth formerly hidden but now revealed is the fact that Christ will dwell within His people and give them a confident "*hope of glory*." The mystery formerly hidden but now revealed is that Christ will take up residence *within* His people. He will dwell *in* His people through the giving of His Holy Spirit. Speaking of His Holy Spirit, Jesus told His disciples,

### **John 14:16-17 (ESV)**

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<sup>17</sup> A member of a pastoral people living in Tanzania and Kenya.

<sup>18</sup> A sermon by John Piper entitled, "To Finish the Aim of Christ's Afflictions," August 30, 1992, source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/to-finish-the-aim-of-christs-afflictions>.

<sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,  
<sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him  
nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Jesus said this before His Ascension. After He ascended into heaven, and took His seat at the right hand of God, and then He received the right to pour out His Spirit into His children. This is what took place on the day of Pentecost—Jesus poured out His Spirit upon His people.<sup>19</sup> This is why Jesus had to leave earth, and return into heaven to the Father, so that He could send the Holy Spirit to us.

**John 16:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

By what means does Christ dwell in you? The answer is *through faith*. To the Ephesians Paul wrote,

**Ephesians 3:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,

Christ dwells in our hearts *through faith*. Putting your faith in Jesus happens when you know that you are a sinner, are convinced that there is nothing you can do to change yourself, you then cry out in confession to Jesus asking forgiveness of your sins, repenting of your sins by turning away from them, trusting in His perfect righteousness, by faith receiving His forgiveness, and then you begin walking in obedience to Christ. When you do this He will give you His own Holy Spirit. And the first act of obedience is baptism. When the people Israel realized their sin and that there was nothing they could do to save themselves, they asked Peter,

**Acts 2:37-38 (ESV)**

“What shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

If you are a believer and you’ve never been baptized, then you are not obeying Jesus. The first step of obedience after becoming a believer is being baptized. Then it is walking in obedience that gives you confidence and certainty of eternal life.

**1 John 3:24 (ESV)**

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<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:14-18.

<sup>24</sup> Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Obedying His commands is abiding in Him. It is by His Spirit within us that we are empowered to obey His word and through His indwelling presence we have hope of glory, i.e. certainty of experiencing the eternal life with Him in heaven.

### **Application to Ministers**

The task of those called to the ministry is rightly handling God's word by unfolding the mysteries contained within. Ministers are to fully explain God's word to God's people. They are to explain the mystery that Jesus is the way of salvation, not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

### **Application to Non-Ministers**

For those of you who are not ministers, your task is the same. Help your coworkers, colleagues, family, friends, and neighbors to understand God's word. Study it for yourself and then share what you learn. The gospel is for the whole world. Anyone and everyone. It is a great mystery of exactly how it is that Christ's Spirit can dwell within us, but He does. We don't see Him enter us, but there should be visible evidence that He is alive within us. If there is not, then it's time to pray.

## A Ministry of Proclamation

Finally, Paul explains that his ministry is a ministry of proclamation.

### **Colossians 1:28-29 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

In other words, Paul says He preaches Jesus as God's messiah since the hope of glory in heaven can only be found through Him. He warns people not to neglect Jesus or twist what the apostles have taught about him. He teaches people with wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit.

Paul's purpose is "*to present everyone mature in Christ.*" This is what he is aiming at as the whole purpose of his ministry. The aim of Paul's ministry was Christian maturity. As he thinks about what it will be like on the final day as everyone stands before God, Paul aims at Christians being presented before God the Father as fully mature in Christ.

This is the goal for which he was toiling and striving. He struggles with "*all His energy that works powerfully in him.*" Paul himself does not possess the power and energy he needs in

order to complete the task to which God has called him. He requires God to supply him with energy from outside himself. In other words, Paul is dependent upon the power and energy supplied to him by the Spirit of God who dwells within him. So Paul has access to power that is beyond his own ability. He is trusting that God will work within him.

### **Application To Ministers**

Those of you who are discerning a call to ministry, your purpose is to proclaim Jesus. Warn people not to neglect Him or to ignore God's word. Warn people not to twist the meaning of Scripture into what they want it to mean, rather than what its author intended it to mean. Depend upon the wisdom of the Spirit of Christ dwelling within you. Strive and toil to advance the gospel of Jesus and help people on towards maturity, but do it by depending upon His strength within you by His Spirit. Keep yourselves holy so that His power can be demonstrated through you.

### Application to Non-Ministers

Those of you who are off to work tomorrow, you too have a purpose, to allow the Spirit of Christ to be manifested through you to your coworkers, colleagues, friends, and family. Warn them not to neglect Jesus or ignore God's word. Gently, but lovingly teach people what God's word means. Depend upon the wisdom provided to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you. Strive and toil to advance the gospel and help people towards maturity, but do it by depending upon the strength of His Spirit within you. Keep yourselves holy so that His might can powerfully work in and through you.

## Conclusion

Paul's ministry was aimed at helping Christians grow towards maturity. Because he knew his purpose, he could joyfully endure all suffering for the sake of those who would believe in Jesus through him. He saw himself as a living example and testimony of the reality of the resurrection and reign of the risen Jesus. He knew God had called him to "make the word of God fully known." This meant explaining a few mysteries, like the fact that Gentiles were included in God's redemptive plan for humanity and that Jesus—through His death, resurrection, and ascension—purchased the right to pour out His Spirit within those who believed in Him. It is the Spirit of Christ dwelling within Christians that gives them a confident hope of glory. This sweet truth is what we have been charged to proclaim to the world, with warnings and wise teaching. The goal of our proclamation, warning, and teaching is help Christians on their way to being mature in Christ and ultimately to one day stand unashamed before God. Toward this end we strive and toil while trusting that the Spirit of God who dwells within us will supply all the strength and power we need to do what He has called us to do.

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you imagine would be the significance to the Colossian readers as they considered that in the introduction of the letter Paul referred to himself as and “apostle of Christ Jesus” (v.1) but now, in verse 25 (and also in v.23), he referred to himself as “minister” or “servant” of the gospel and of Christ?
2. Why do you think Paul wanted the Colossians to know that he “rejoiced in his sufferings for their sake” (v.24)? Are you able to or have you ever been able to rejoice in Christ when you suffer? Why or why not?
3. What is your response to the quote that, “A proper, biblical theology of suffering must include the fact that God, in His omnipotent sovereignty, is able to effect good and holy results in the lives of his beloved children through suffering?” What biblical verses or passages help you endure suffering?
4. Have you ever before considered that when Christians are suffering for Christ that they are providing physical evidence and tangible proof for the reality of the resurrection and reign of Jesus? If not, what are your thoughts about this now?
5. What are the two aspects of the mystery in God’s word that Paul was called to “make fully known?” (see Col. 1:25-27).
6. Do you agree or disagree that Gentiles were included in God’s original redemptive plan? Why or why not? Share a few Biblical examples to support your answer.
7. Have you ever seriously considered being a vocational missionary (i.e. crossing cultures to share the gospel with a people group other than your people group of origin)? Describe the experience.
8. Describe your thoughts when you read the phrase “Christ in you, the hope of glory?” What is Paul trying to communicate?
9. Describe in your own words what it means to receive the Holy Spirit? Offer biblical support for your answer.
10. What part of these six verses is most meaningful to you? Explain your answer.
11. Over the past 5 to 7 years in what ways have you matured in your faith in Christ?
12. In what area of your life do you still need to mature?