

Study in Colossians

Session 3

Paul digresses a bit in this passage (Colossians 1:24-2:7) by explaining his ministry to the Colossian church. Keep in mind that they had never personally met the apostle. It was Epaphras who had started the church and had told them about Paul but this letter was their first direct contact with him. In this section, Paul describes the ministry of suffering, his commission to preach the gospel, his personal interest and concern for the Colossian Christians and then gave them a direct appeal for godly action and growth in their faith.

I. The ministry of suffering. [Read Colossians 1:24]

A. The sufferings that the apostle Paul endured in the course of his labors were in the interest of the Colossians and the whole church and in this knowledge, he rejoices.

1. “now” - shows us the link between Paul’s ministry and the sufferings he endured with what came before, which as the supremacy of Christ. Because Christ is supreme over everything, Paul is able to rejoice understanding that his sufferings had a purpose in building up the church.

2. There are three things mentioned in this verse about Paul’s sufferings:

a. They are for the sake of other people. - “for you” - for Christ’s body, the church

1) “for” in both places means “in the interest of” NOT “in place of”

2) Paul had suffered imprisonment in the interest of bringing the gospel to the Gentile world. The Colossians had benefitted from his imprisonment. We are still reaping the benefits of Paul’s sufferings today.

b. Paul’s sufferings are identified with the afflictions of Christ.

1) This verse is not implying that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was in any way lacking or deficient in fulfilling God’s will in bringing salvation to mankind. (See Colossians 2:11-15). Christ’s death was complete and a once for all sacrifice not needing any human involvement to complete.

2) Paul is not saying that his sufferings in any way are redemptive in nature. They are not on the same level as the sufferings of Christ in any way. Paul’s sufferings did nothing to reconcile God to man, as Christ’s did on the cross.

3) “filling up in turn” - only place in NT this word is used. To take a phrase from baseball, it means Paul was taking his turn at bat. Paul’s sufferings were for the sake of the gospel’s spread and in that sense, every time a Christian suffers, it furthers the gospel because we don’t suffer for ourselves but for the sake of others. The afflictions of every saint supplement the afflictions of Christ in that the church is built up by such sufferings. It is the self-denial of every generation of believers that builds and maintains the church into the future. Like Paul, we continue what Christ began.

4) “lacking” - means “left overs”. Christ did the heavy hitting opening up the way of salvation by His death but now we have left over sufferings that prove we belong to Him. This shows the intimate relationship between the body of Christ, the church, and the head, Jesus Christ. There was still sufferings that Paul needed to endure for the sake of the gospel. God wasn’t finished with him yet and since that was the case, Paul understood that would involve more sufferings in this life.

a) **II Corinthians 11: 21-33**

b) I Peter 4:12-16

c) II Timothy 3:10-12

Q: When you consider the ministry of your Christian life, how often do you consider the sufferings you endure for the sake of others for the gospel?

c. Third, the sufferings of Paul are in the sphere of joy. Paul never allowed his sufferings to bring him to a place of perplexity or sadness. Rather, he saw them from God's perspective and that gave him true joy - the knowledge and satisfaction of God's will being advanced. He's not equating that he had to suffer to advance the gospel but he is saying that when adversity and suffering hit him, he maintained the attitude that it was for the sake of others, as Christ's sufferings had been.

Q: How can you maintain joy when you are plunged into a time of suffering?

5) As a side note, Paul's suffering had nothing in common with the ascetics of who inflicted heavy punishment upon themselves believing that it would earn them merit with God. His sufferings, since Christ was no longer bodily present in the world, were a way for Christ to be seen through him and continue the ministry of the gospel in the world.

II. The ministry of preaching [Read Colossians 1:25-29]

A. The second feature of Paul's ministry was preaching of God's message.

1. The first thing Paul wants the Colossians to know is his appointment to the office of preacher. He needs them to know how he came about doing what he does.

a. "stewardship" - commission or administration, in this case of God. He didn't choose his calling, God called him to this ministry and to be obedient to God, he yielded to the Lord's calling.

b. The purpose of his calling was to "fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God".

1) "fully carry" - to make full or to make complete. His calling was to make complete the Word of God to those he encountered.

Q: What are two ways we make complete the Word of God today? (words and actions)

2) **II Thessalonians 3:1** - "spread" means "to run". Paul is asking for the prayers of the Thessalonian believers to make the Word of God run to its intended conclusion and to have a triumphant ending to all its labors.

c. The first and foremost function Paul saw as the role of the God-called preacher should be to make clear the nature of the gospel as the divine provision for all people to come to salvation in Christ.

d. I've heard it said and believe it: Two of the most miserable people in the world are those who are not called by God to preach but go into preaching and those who are called by God to preach and yet don't respond to the call. When you read Paul's testimony in Acts 9, you are confronted with God calling Paul and then Paul yielding to this call.

2. Paul then turns the tables on the Gnostics. He used their own word against them.

a. “mystery” (v.26) - the proclamation of the Word of God or the gospel message. To the Gnostics, mystery was the term used to describe the secret knowledge of God needed to earn salvation. However, in the New Testament it is used often to describe the truths which are undiscoverable except by divine revelation. Man cannot know anything about God except where God chooses to reveal that truth to man.

b. This mystery has been revealed by God to His saints. Anyone who gets saved, knows the mystery. In Christ, this mystery is made complete and thus there is urgency in proclaiming the gospel as it has now been fully revealed to man. This brings great joy to Paul and it fulfills his joy in preaching the gospel in that the long silence from God has been broken with the ministry of Jesus Christ.

3. It is the saints who are willed by the Lord the riches of His glory.

a. The glory is that Christ is in the saints. This is the personal experience of Christ in the life of the individual believer. Christ is not a distant demi-god or unknowable spirit but rather, in order to show the glory of God, He now dwells in believers.

b. Hope is a joyous expectation or anticipation. Glory is the “shine” of God Himself, it is a way in which the invisible God makes Himself visible to mankind. It doesn’t matter whether this person is Jew or Gentile, Christ came to dwell inside all people and when He does they can expect the anticipation of God’s working in their lives - all the way until glorification and heaven. This will certainly pertain to the final judgment and eternity but it also pertains to there here and now. God seeks to work through His servants all the time.

Q: Knowing that Christ lives in you, do you anticipate God to breakthrough your lives and reveal His glory through you?

4. The goal of Paul’s preaching was to present every man complete in Christ.

(v.28)

a. “complete” - “having reached its end”, mature, perfect in what it was designed to accomplish.

b. Only in Christ can anyone ever become “complete” in this sense. Until a person has Christ living within them, they cannot reach the fulness for which they were given life by God in the first place.

c. This is done by teaching and wisdom.

5. To accomplish this end, Paul gave himself unreservedly.

a. “striving” - athletic term meaning to contend for a prize, also labor earnestly, fight for.

1) **I Timothy 6:12** - fight

2) **Luke 13:24** - strive

b. Paul would not take his calling lightly but rather gave it his all.

c. It wasn’t his power but rather God’s that worked in him mightily. He understood that it was the supernatural power of God, rather than his own natural power, that accomplished God’s will in proclaiming the gospel. In addition to this though, Paul gave his all, everything he had, to the ministry to which he was called.

d. This is a picture of how we should also approach the proclamation of the gospel. We need to give it all we have but also trust and allow the power of God to work through us, directing and empowering us, to see His will done. The main obstacle to spreading the gospel is our attitude, not God’s power.

III. The ministry of intercession [Read Colossians 2:1-5]

A. The third feature of Paul's ministry was the pastoral concern for those he served. He wants those in Colossae and Laodicea to know the intense struggle he waged on their behalf. This struggle was against the forces of false doctrine and Paul was never indifferent to error and felt this one needed immediate attention.

1. v.1 - "struggle" - against this is an athletic term which means contest or struggle in an athletic event. In other words, there is a winner and a loser and Paul didn't want the true gospel to be the loser in this case.

2. Of course, since he was in prison, his only offensive weapon to use was that of prayer. He had no option to visit them and so this letter and his prayers and the prayers of his co-laborers were his sole weapons. Those in Colossae and Laodicea had never met Paul face to face but would need to take his words to heart in order to overcome the false teaching being presented to them.

3. v.2 - "knit together" - knit has the connotation here of being coalescing together or coming together properly by means of common teaching.

a. The common theme of this teaching is love. Love is what binds the hearts of those who have received the gospel message together. God's love binds believers together.

b. When a person is encouraged and knit together in love, that person gains an inward wealth that consists of the full assurance of understanding.

Q: What do you think Paul has in mind when he says "the full assurance of understanding?" (Paul is referring to the hearts of believers. They can know for sure that the gospel is true based upon their knowledge of the truth of the gospel and their experiences. Their experiences also testify to their heart that what they have learned and are living out is indeed the truth of God.)

Q: What is possible when one's experiences line up with one's beliefs? (boldness in living, etc.)

c. This confident understanding results in the true knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ Himself. This is once again, opposed to the false knowledge of the Gnostic teaching.

4. In Christ is found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Again, He is supreme when it comes to matters of thought and the mind. These treasures are available to all Christians and those treasures of wisdom are in Christ in a "hidden" way.

a. "hidden" - coffer or storehouse for treasure. The truths are not hidden in the conventional sense but rather laid up in a storehouse for all those who are saved to know fresh by repeated discovery in life.

Q: In what sense does the Word of God remain fresh to us today? (it speaks to our current circumstances)

5. Paul ends this section by revealing to the Colossians why he is filled with anxious concern. He doesn't want them to be deluded by falsehood.

a. "persuasive argument" would be translated "fast talk" or "handing someone a smooth line". It presents the picture of trying to convince someone through fine-sounding arguments which have no basis in fact or reality - mere double-talk.

b. v.5 - "good discipline" - military term connoting the orderly array of a band of

disciplined soldiers. The Colossians had not yet disbanded or given into the temptation to break ranks in the face of the enemy.

c. All of this shows Paul's heart of compassion and concern for these people he had never met personally. His interest in them was sincere and despite not being with them physically, he rejoiced that they were standing firm and that their faith in Christ was stable. They were remaining unshaken in Christ.

Q: How can this section lead us in our prayer for others?

Q: Who are some of the people we have not yet met but we know could use our prayer?

IV. Ministry of exhortation. [Read Colossians 2:6-7]

A. This is the only place where Paul used this phrase "Christ Jesus the Lord". He does so to refute the Gnostic heresy. He was the incarnation of the Spirit of Christ as well as eternal God and Lord. He was not some angel or other created being but the Lord of all.

B. Paul encourages the Colossians, based upon the identity of Christ, to continue walking in Him. The tense of the verb "walk" (present, active) could be translated, "go on walking" or "stick to your initial lessons about Christ".

1. Their lives should conform to their teachings.

2. It's one thing to believe the truth in your mind. It's another thing (and this is the Biblical view of the word belief) that you believe something to the extent that you are changed and actually live according to that belief.

3. v.7 contains four descriptions of the "walk in Christ".

a. "rooted" - means to take root. It is in perfect tense suggesting that this is a once-for-all experience. It speaks of our salvation in Christ. Once we were saved through faith in Christ, we were rooted, or caused to take root in Him and will never be uprooted.

b. "built up" - present tense suggests a continuing process. While we were once and for all rooted in Christ, we are constantly being built up by our faith in Him.

c. "established/strengthened" - means to confirm - also in present tense which means it's on-going or a process that is happening within each believer. The longer we live in Christ the more He is confirmed to us or proved to us as real. This establishment takes place in the sphere of our faith.

d. "overflowing with gratitude" - overflowing translates one of Paul's favorite words which is usually translated "abound" but overflow is a better definition for it. It is in the present tense so we know that for believers, gratitude to God is an on-going, constant, habitual action of our hearts. It pictures a river of thanksgiving flowing from our hearts to God constantly. Anyone who lacks gratitude to God is especially vulnerable to doubt and spiritual delusion.

e. So walking in Christ means one is rooted in Christ and is being built up in Christ, strengthened in our faith and overflowing with gratitude to God.

Q: Which of these areas are you most deficient in?

Q: How do we build up one another in their walk in Christ?

Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?