

## Lesson 5

# Colossians 1.24–29: Why Paul Preached

## Introduction

Paul has just finished up one of the most significant treatises in Christianity regarding the doctrine of who Jesus is. Jesus was fully God and human at the same time. He ranks over all of creation because He is the creator of all things. He ranks over the church because He is the founder and life giver of the church. This was all for the purpose of our redemption through His blood shed on the cross.

The effects of our redemption are amazing. By the power of Jesus Himself, we have gone from a state of *alienation*, *hostility*, and *evil* to that of *holiness* and *blamelessness*, where no accusation can be made against us. It's an amazing fact that brings the highest responsibility to our life: continuity in the gospel delivered once for all by the Spirit, preached by the apostles. Because of these facts, Paul embraced his mission as an apostle. The task of taking the gospel to the Gentiles was the driving force behind everything in his life. Much suffering accompanied this. Paul was writing this epistle from a prison cell, 4.10. The details of his sufferings are made known in other writings, with 2 Corinthians 11.23–28 being one of the most detailed.

Despite all these things, Paul *rejoiced* in his work. And even though the work was often grueling and mentally / emotionally taxing, Paul moved with an energy and power that he knew was being supplied by Jesus Himself, 1.29. In this lesson, we'll look at three main points:

1. 1.24—Ministry is accompanied by suffering.
2. 1.25–28—Ministry is distinguished by servant leadership.
3. 1.29—Ministry is fueled by Christ.

### **1.24—Ministry and Suffering**

As Paul writes this letter, it appears likely he is in a prison cell inside Ephesus

or Rome. He communicates that the suffering he is experiencing is ongoing. Reading through the New Testament, this certainly appears to be the case. Besides what is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11, we read of:

- Verbal abuse: Acts 13.45; 14.2; 17.13; 18.6; 19.9.
- False allegations: Acts 18.12–13; 21.27–29.
- Being run out of cities: Acts 13.50.
- Assaults on his life: Acts 14.5–6.
- Beatings: Acts 21.32.
- Betrayal: 2 Timothy 1.15; 4.16.<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of this, Paul disciplined his thoughts, keeping in mind the purpose for it all and that through suffering he could serve others. *I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake*, Colossians 1.24a. In his final letter to Timothy, he writes:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

—2 Timothy 2.8–12

## ***How can suffering be a cause for joy?***

### **Suffering draws us closer to Christ**

When *we* suffer, our degree of understanding what Jesus went through in *His* suffering helps us to better relate to Him. It draws us closer to Him.

### **Suffering helps us to focus on the reward**

When we go through trials and anguish our focus on the world to come is sharpened. This world is not our home. For this light momentary affliction is

<sup>62</sup> McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians...*, p. 185.

*preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 2 Corinthians 4.17.*

### **Suffering can lead to the salvation of others**

Philippians was also written during a time of imprisonment for Paul and notice how he frames the situation:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

—Philippians 1.12–14

Many in the imperial guard may have never heard of the gospel had it not been for Paul. Had he not suffered, many would have never been confronted with the gospel message of joy and reconciliation. It was in the context of suffering and rejection that Peter wrote:

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

—1 Peter 3.15–16

Christian history is filled with accounts of the lost coming to Christ after they witnessed the suffering and martyrdom of the saints.

At its most basic level, we can safely say Paul welcomed suffering because he saw it as an unavoidable consequence of preaching the gospel. Another premise of suffering is that it represents the path of Christ—a demonstration we are walking even as He walked (Matthew 10.38, 1 John 2.6).

### **1.24b—Filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions ...**

What does this statement mean? Paul was receiving persecution that was intended for Christ. Paul focused on the church as the body, thus the embodiment of Jesus. Paul envisioned the need for additional suffering for the Body of Christ to endure, and in his body he will endure it.

See also 2 Corinthians 1.5 and Galatians 6.17.

## **1.25–27—Ministry and Servant Leadership**

Paul did everything he did for the *sake of (the) body, the church*. His mission centered on preaching the gospel. Paul refers to his preaching as a *stewardship from God*. He had been personally commissioned by Jesus and like a good servant or steward he was following his Master’s instructions while the Master was away. Paul also describes it similarly in 1 Corinthians 9.17 and Ephesians 3.2. *Stewardship* is the “responsibility of management,”<sup>63</sup> “commission,” “purpose, scheme, plan, or arrangement.” The commission, specifically, was the delivering of the message of the gospel to the Gentiles, Ephesians 3.8; 1 Timothy 1.4.

Note how Paul viewed himself as a servant. He is not lord over the church. He is simply a participant in God’s great plan of saving mankind from hell. Note *how* he served the church by making *the word of God fully known*. “Fully” carries along the idea of “complete, filled out entirely,” or to “abound.”<sup>64</sup> Abound in what? *The word of God*. It has been said that the “word” is *God’s providential deposit of divine knowledge and gospel preaching*.<sup>65</sup>

### **1.26–27—The content of Paul’s preaching**

In 1.26 the *word of God* is further described as *the mystery*, i.e., information previously unknown. It was not discovered by human intellect, but it was

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63 Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 697. Subsequent references to this work will be identified as BDAG.

64 Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 23.

65 McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians...*, p. 195.

divinely revealed by God's working in Christ and the proclamation of that message, Ephesians 3.1–12. There is nothing mysterious or secretive about the message ... as was common among the pagan religions<sup>66</sup> ... it was freely open and made available to all.

What is the mystery? Ephesians 2.11–22 and the passage here in Colossians give us the answer. The *mystery* is, *Christ in* (each of) *you*, that is, the Gentiles. Ephesians 2.18 says, *for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father*. There are two very important things we need to pull out of this.

First, we need to focus on Christ. Jesus, King of the Universe, has expanded God's kingdom to include the Gentiles. Relating this back to 1.15–20, the center of the gospel is squarely on Jesus, who is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. Not only that, He is the focus of all the creation ... all things have been created *for Him*. *It is a mistake to think the gospel can be reduced to the message of our salvation; the gospel is the message about Christ who is King, Lord, and Savior. The gospel saves because the Messiah is the Savior; the Savior is not the means of the gospel but its content.*<sup>67</sup>

Second, what does *Christ in you* mean? *You* is written in plural form and seems to stress Gentile believers as a whole. This fits well with the plural phrase *among the Gentiles* used in the beginning part of 1.27. God dwells inside the new people of God, the church, corporately, through the Spirit. But it would be a mistake to conclude that there is no individual application here. Scripture is clear that Christ takes up residence inside the heart of every believer.<sup>68</sup> This is the carrying out of what Jesus foretold on the night of His betrayal: Jesus answered him, *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*, John 14.23.

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66 In Paul's day Hellenistic mystery cults thrived on rituals that claimed to be able to unlock the "knowledge" hidden inside of "undisclosed secrets."

67 McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians ...*, p. 199.

68 Galatians 2.20; Romans 8.10; 2 Corinthians 13.5; Ephesians 3.17.

The blessing of this very personal communion or fellowship began on the occasion of our baptism where we *received the gift of the Holy Spirit*, Acts 2.38; 5.32; Titus 3.4–6. What is written by Paul in another place seems appropriate here:

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

—2 Corinthians 6.16b

The fact that every wall of separation has been removed and destroyed, allowing the closest possible relationship with Christ fuels our *hope of glory*. The theme of the gospel is hope of eternal blessing and honor. Ephesians 1 summarizes it thusly:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

—Ephesians 1.13–14

### **1.28—The aim of Paul’s preaching**

Paul proclaimed *Jesus*. He was the substance of their message, whether it be leading people to believe, or strengthening those who already have. This was done with both negative (*warning everyone*) and positive (*teaching everyone*) exhortation. To *warn* a person would involve training and discipline. This is seen in how Paul admonished, criticized, and corrected people.<sup>69</sup> To *teach* means to impart knowledge.

Focus again on 1.28. See the words *proclaim, warn, teach*. This is the pattern he followed in Colossians. Colossians 1.1–25 proclaims Christ. 2.6–23 warns against false teaching. 3.1—4.6 teaches about Christian living.<sup>70</sup>

69 1 Thessalonians 5.12; 1 Corinthians 4.14.

70 Thurston, *Reading Colossians ...*, p. 32.

All of this was for the goal of *maturity*. Spiritual maturity involves the idea of becoming like Christ. This is continual on our part. We are always to be growing to be more like Him. This is never a finished work while dwelling on earth.

In Ephesians Paul presents it this way:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

—Ephesians 4.11–13

## 1.29—Ministry is Fueled by Christ

*Toil* in 1.29 means to work until the point of extreme fatigue. Bullinger describes it as to be “spent with labour.”<sup>71</sup> He continues with this thought into 2.1 when he says, *I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you...* The work and *struggle* Paul agonized over prayer and standing firm against opponents of healthy teaching. In 1 Thessalonians 2.9 he mentioned that he *worked night and day* for the sake of the gospel. Much of this time was spent in prayer, 1 Thessalonians 3.10; 2 Timothy 1.3. Paul worked so hard in ministry that it brought him to the point of exhaustion.

However, note the power source fueling him. Who supplied Paul with energy? *Struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*. Paul was not left to his own devices as he did the work of an apostle. Jesus, via the Holy Spirit, was with Him every day giving him the power to stay focused on his ministry. The same is true for us today.

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71 Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 98.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. For whose sake did Paul endure his sufferings? How was he serving others as he suffered?
2. How can suffering draw you closer to Christ?
3. How can suffering lead to the salvation of someone else?
4. By his suffering, how did Paul fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions?
5. What was Paul's *stewardship*?
6. What did Paul's preaching focus on?
7. What is the *mystery* that has been revealed to the saints?
8. What does it mean that *Christ (is) in you*?

9. How does Christ being *in us* fuel our *hope of glory*?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How hard did Paul work to accomplish his mission? Cite some scriptures to back up your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Who supplied Paul with the energy to accomplish his work?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How can we apply this to our personal life?