

## **OUR MINISTRY IN CHRIST** **Colossians 1:28–29**

### **PRAY**

Good morning. If this is your first time here, my name is Adrian Garcia and I serve as the associate pastor of student ministries and missions. Our lead pastor John Marc and Paula got back from visiting family.

We always tell our guests three things: First, we are grateful that you are here. We consider you to be God’s gift to us, so thank you for choosing to worship with us this morning.

Second, you’re in a place where the ground is level which means no one is any higher, better, or more significant than anyone else. The ground at the foot of the cross is level ground and we are all sinners in need of a Savior. And Jesus is that wonderful Savior.

While your salvation may be a personal matter, God never designed it to be a private matter. He wants us to live as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Which leads to the third thing we have to tell you: And that is that we love you enough to speak the truth to you. And that is Truth with a capital T. The truth about God’s Word, about Jesus, His person, His works, and His words and how He will change your life from the inside out. He is the Cornerstone of our faith.

### **INTRODUCTION**

David Wells said, **“It is very easy to build churches in which seekers congregate; it is very hard to build churches in which biblical faith is maturing into genuine discipleship.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **Read Colossians 1:13–29**

**MAIN POINT:** In Colossians 1:28–29 Paul presents three features of his own ministry that we must imitate to strengthen the ministry that God has put before us.

### **OUTLINE:**

- 1. THE METHOD OF OUR MINISTRY (28a)**
  - a. ADMONISHING**
  - b. TEACHING**
- 2. THE MOTIVE OF OUR MINISTRY (28b)**
- 3. THE MANNER OF OUR MINISTRY (29)**

## **I. THE METHOD OF OUR MINISTRY (28a)**

**We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom,**

Paul opens by saying **we proclaim Him**. Who is the “we” referring to? This refers to Paul and Timothy, and likely Epaphras, a fellow worker with Paul. It isn’t limited to these individuals though.

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Associate Pastor Adrian Garcia

We know God used Paul to advance the gospel throughout much of the known world in his time. We also know that he used Paul to write 13 books of the NT. But consider this, Paul also oversaw the writing of Luke and Acts. So, in total the Lord used Paul to write or influence roughly 51% of the NT.<sup>2</sup>

As the Lord used Paul in these significant ways we must understand that he also used him as an example for all believers.

**1 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.**

**Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.**

**Philippians 4:9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things...**

**2 Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example...**

The reason why Paul could tell people to imitate him was because he was imitating Christ. **1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.**

It's as one puritan said, **"You are to follow no man further than he follows Christ."**<sup>3</sup>

When Paul says **we** here it is legitimate to read "we as Christians". Paul's work in ministry is an example to us. To be clear, we are not apostles, but Paul's ministry is a model for our ministry.

Who is this Him he is referring to? To understand the weight of his words here we need to understand the context. Colossians chapter one is one of the richest chapters in the NT declaring the glory of Jesus Christ.

He is the risen King who has welcomed us into His glorious kingdom (13). It is only in Him that we have redemption and the forgiveness of our sins (14). Jesus, through His incarnation became the perfect image of the invisible God (15).

He has created every single thing that exists or ever will exist and all of it was created through Him and for Him (16). He is eternal, has no beginning or end, and by Him all things are sustained and hold together (17). Literally, the air we are currently breathing is His and the reason our bodies are functioning is because He wills it.

He is the Head of the church, which is His body (18). And He is the first to conquer death, resurrected in power to display that He is the preeminent One (19). He is God in the flesh, and it was the Father's good pleasure that through Jesus reconciliation and peace with God would be made through His blood shed on the cross (20).

It is impossible to overestimate His glory and worth. One pastor said, **"There are two hundred and fifty-six names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express."**<sup>4</sup>

Paul says, this is the One whom we proclaim! This is the One we announce to others. Jesus is the One we preach to others. He is the One we speak about and constantly point others to.

<sup>2</sup> Luke and Acts – 37,932 words – 27.48%; Paul – 32,408 words – 23.48%

<sup>3</sup> A Puritan Golden Treasury, compiled by I.D.E. Thomas, by permission of Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. 2000, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Billy Sunday, gracequotes.org.

False teachers proclaim themselves. False religions promote systems of philosophy and traditions. Legalism presents lists of rules and regulations. And worldly people preach politics. But we, as Christians, proclaim a person. We proclaim Christ! Our ministry is to proclaim Him, His lordship, and His work, following the example Christ modeled.

Proclaiming Christ requires two types of instruction. Let's look at the first. Paul says...

### **admonishing every man**

The word **admonish** carries the idea of instruction, exhortation, or even counseling. The word has elements of encouragement and persuasion. But what separates **admonishment** from the word **teaching** is that it conveys a sense of warning. One commentator put it this way, **“‘Admonishing’ in Scripture has the connotation of confronting with the intent of changing one’s attitudes and actions.”**<sup>5</sup>

The desired result of **admonishment** is repentance. It is a warning that shows where a person's beliefs are in error and the intent is to have them corrected. It could include urging unbelievers to consider their sin and the judgment of God while presenting the offer of salvation through Christ.

It can include warning believers to turn from sinful thinking or sinful behavior and turn to Christ. Paul says to the Ephesian elders: **Acts 20:31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.**

We don't merely present the truth of Christ to others, but we proclaim Christ with an eye towards application. These truths are not just cold dry facts. The truths are ultimate reality. Christ and the gospel compel us to respond correctly.

The instruction to admonish shows that proclaiming positive truth is good, but it is also necessary warn people about lies and sin. But as necessary as it is to admonish people of the dangers of sin it is also necessary to teach them the Scriptures. That is why Paul includes the second element of proclaiming Christ...

### **and teaching every man**

The word **teaching** refers to formal or informal instruction. Where admonishment sought to correct wrong beliefs and practice, teaching looks to form right beliefs and practice. Again, one commentator said, **“‘Teaching’ is the orderly presentation of Christian truth for converts so that they may know how to grow.”**<sup>6</sup>

In the same conversation with the Ephesian elders Paul says in **Acts 20:20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,**

At this point, you might be thinking, “How do we know that teaching and admonishing are something all believers should be practicing?”

**Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...**

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<sup>5</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 242.

<sup>6</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 242.

There certainly is a formal component to admonishing and teaching. This is the role of the elders and gifted leaders in the church. But the informal acts admonishing and teaching are fundamental to the Christian life. You could say these are the basics. It is discipleship 101. This is call of every Christian. This is the ministry of every believer.

Our ministry of discipleship can't be superficial. It needs depth. Depth of teaching, depth of warning. It needs to inform the mind and compel the will. If discipleship is to be biblical, then warning and teaching must go together. They complement one another.

But to do this well takes skill, and that is why Paul says he does this with...

### **with all wisdom,**

Teaching and admonishing well involves finesse. Wisdom in these areas is the ability to communicate truth in an exceptional manner. This wisdom can only come by an increasing personal knowledge of Christ. But, as many of us know, wisdom is not knowledge alone. No, wisdom is demonstrated in the ability to practically apply that knowledge to the issues of life.

Teaching with all wisdom means one knows God's Word and skilled in ministering it to others. A wise person knows the most appropriate times, and the most fitting ways of communicating truth to others. The wise person understands that not every person must be warned or taught the same. One must adapt their teaching to different circumstances and different personalities, and even consider the different capacities of those they are seeking to teach.

For discipleship to happen believers need to be saturated in the Scriptures to know what to instruct. For discipleship to happen believers need to not fear speaking the truth in love. For discipleship to happen believers must be increasing in wisdom.

### **Jiu Jitsu Illustration: "Have you ever had a new job or tried something completely new to you?"**

The setting for discipleship is relationship. Christians need to be sharing life together. Christ never intended for His people to show up once a week to a building for an hour and a half and call that faithful Christian living. No, in Scripture we see the words "daily" being regularly used for the fellowship of believers. If you don't have a deepening relationship with other Christians, then you are likely not being disciplined and not discipling others.

But what is the goal of discipleship? Paul provides the motive of our ministry in the second half of the verse...

## **II. THE MOTIVE OF OUR MINISTRY (28b)** **so that we may present every man complete in Christ.**

The phrase **so that** is what we call a purpose clause. It explains why we proclaim Christ admonishing everyone and teaching everyone. It is so that...

The word **present** here is commonly used in the presentation as of a sacrifice. Paul is giving the imagery of a priest offering up sacrifices to God. Paul's ambition was to present believers to Christ (like a metaphorical sacrifice) on the final day. To present mature, complete Christians in Christ, who are wholly devoted to their Lord. That is why he says in **Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

Three times Paul writes **every man**. This is significant. First, it emphasizes evangelism. The gospel must be preached to all people without any distinctions. Christ is proclaimed to everyone without any discrimination toward one's intelligence, ethnicity, economic status, social class, political persuasion, or religious background. The gospel is to be proclaimed to every person without exception.

Second, this puts emphasis on the discipleship of every Christian. Every believer is to be admonished. Every believer is to be taught. Paul is concerned about every Christian being presented as complete in Christ. He did not want any individual Christian to remain in a state of incompleteness.

The gospel is to go to every person. Every Christian is to be discipled. And lastly, the repetition of every man emphasizes that every Christian is capable of becoming complete.

Paul's ministry didn't end when his hearers professed Christ. That is just the beginning. His aim was to present every person, every child of God, every sheep in Christ's fold, every blood-bought saint as complete in Christ. Like Paul, we must be concerned with the growth and discipleship of every believer that God puts before us.

These realities fuel our ministry of discipleship. All believers are encompassed in this goal. All believers are to pursue this goal. And all believers are to actively participate in achieving this goal. And what is that goal? We see it in the next phrase.

### **complete in Christ**

To be **complete in Christ** means to be mature in Christ. This has two components: there is an information aspect (knowledge/understanding/renewing of mind) and an application aspect (walking/living/doing). There needs to be a knowledge of God's Word but also a humble obedience to His Word.

To be mature Christian one must have a proper understanding of the truths of God and the gospel, but they also must have proper Christlike living. You can't have one without the other. The gospel must transform us completely or it doesn't transform us at all.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

As Christians we understand that this is a process. It takes place over our lifetime, and even then, none of us reach perfection this side of glory. Yet, our goal as Christians is to be complete in Christ. To be mature followers of our Lord.

Mature Christians have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Mature Christians exercise discernment Mature Christians have lives that are holy, filled with good deeds, and are more and more looking like the life of Christ.

Someone could ask, "Well, why is this our goal? Why can't Christians just do a little bit more than the bare minimum? Why can't Christians just show up on Sundays? Why do Christians have to pursue the goal of growth and maturity (discipleship) in Christ?" Because this is Christ's goal. Look at v.22 of this chapter. There we find that Christ redeemed you **to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—**

We need to realize that even now Jesus lives in His people through the Holy Spirit, empowering, leading, convicting, and working towards the goal that we are conformed to His image. **Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...**

Paul's purpose in ministry was derived from Christ's purpose. Paul's focus was on discipleship. Our focus must be on discipleship.

Do we have this same desire? Do we see ourselves working towards this end? Discipleship is the means that leads to believers being complete in Christ.

### **Illustration of presenting a gift to a loved one.**

Church, in love, may I be so bold as to say, that if this isn't your purpose then it might be that you are not yet a disciple of Christ. If you are not engaged in living life with other Christians. If you are not involved in teaching, instructing, counseling, and warning other believers towards growth in Christ then there is a chance that you don't yet understand the call of Christ.

What did Jesus say to His disciples? **Matthew 4:19 "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."** Are you following Jesus? Are you helping others follow Him? If you profess to be a Christian, on the authority of Christ's Word, I can tell you, that discipleship is His will for your life.

**[Discipleship] is not merely another commitment which we add to the long list of our other commitments, but it is the commitment – demanding a reordering of our lives from the bottom up (Robert C. Tannehill)<sup>7</sup>**

Paul has modeled the method of our ministry, the motive of our ministry, and now we will see his example for the manner of our ministry.

### **III. THE MANNER OF OUR MINISTRY (29)**

**For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

Paul says that in light of his purpose he **labors** and **strives**.

The word **labor** means 'to toil' 'to work hard' 'to struggle'. The picture is of a person working to the point of exhaustion.

The word **striving** is similar. It means 'to strive' 'to struggle', 'to strain', 'to make every effort, or to do everything possible'. Both of these words were used to describe an athlete's effort to train for their competition.

In the same way that an athlete strains and agonizes in a workout to prepare for their event, Paul gives an equivalent effort in his goal of bringing believers to maturity in Christ. This description is consistent with the biblical witness of Paul's ministry.

Paul prayed fervently and preached constantly. He battled against false doctrine. He worked tirelessly to establish churches and raise up church leaders. One incredible statistic about his efforts in advancing the gospel is that most scholars agree that when you total up all of Paul's missionary journeys, the man traveled over 10,000 miles, and the majority of that was on foot!

This morning Jeff Caulkins read **2 Corinthians 11:24–28**. The most intriguing part of that whole description is the last sentence in verse 28. It has this building momentum, and what does Paul say was one of the more

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<sup>7</sup> From The Sword of His Mouth by Robert C. Tannehill copyright © 1975, Fortress, p. 159. Used by Permission (gracequotes.org).

difficult things he endured? **Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.** Paul is an incredible example to us for ministry.

But before we are tempted to think too highly of Paul, we need to understand where he got his ability to do this. There was no way that he could do this alone. It was impossible in his own effort. And that is why Paul finishes by saying...

**according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

Paul was completely dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ to empower every facet of his ministry. As one commentator said, **“no room for doubt is left as to Paul’s own utter dependence on God’s enabling for the exhausting schedule that he followed, or as to its effectiveness.”**<sup>8</sup>

So Paul depended on Christ to give the grace he needed to keep his heart zealous. He depended on Christ to give him grace in the form of energy to work hard and strive. He depended on Christ to graciously do the work of sanctifying believers and producing fruit in their lives.

With this verse we see the mysterious harmony of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. It is a two-sided coin. Paul doesn’t give half-hearted effort towards this work. He doesn’t approach discipleship lazily and expect God’s grace to offset his poor effort. But he also doesn’t think that fruitfulness in ministry depends on him.

Instead, he knows that it is Christ’s desire for Christians to reach maturity and that he is a tool in that work. With that mindset he can work hard and pray diligently, knowing it is God who is working both in him and in those he is pouring into.

Paul communicates the effort he gave to disciple Christians to maturity in order to present them to Christ on the final day. He knew that this could only be done by the power of Christ, which is why he was a man of prayer.

These verses highlight Paul’s intense concern for believers and the work he did as a result. Seeing his example begs the question, do we have this same concern for believers? Do we have this same desire to see believers mature in Christ? And if we do, are we putting forth an appropriate effort?

### **Illustration: Mat Fraser**

While listening to a sermon this week I heard a pastor say something that rattled me. He said, **“Persecution is not the greatest danger facing the church today, worldliness is.”**<sup>9</sup> He went on to quote Spurgeon, **“I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present time has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.”**

Listen to what Jesus said about the thorny soil in **Luke 8:14** **“The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”**

We have to ask ourselves the question, what is keeping us from being discipled and discipling others? This is the ministry Christ has called us to. Large properties, renovated homes, job promotions, academic accolades,

<sup>8</sup> R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, ed. G. I. Davies and G. N. Stanton, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 182.

<sup>9</sup> Austin Duncan, The Gospel According to Moses, Deuteronomy 4–29, 9/17/2023

political advocacy, athletic endeavors, entertainment, and hobbies won't matter in eternity. But what we did for Christ will. Brothers and sisters, don't store up for yourselves treasures here on earth, store them in heaven!

Listen to Jesus' words in **Luke 9:57–62 ... someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."**

**<sup>58</sup>[Jesus replied], "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." <sup>59</sup>...He said to another, "Follow Me." [the man replied], "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>[Jesus responded], "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup>Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." <sup>62</sup>But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The cost is high, but the reward is infinitely higher. Image if you could do one good work...

Let's not be like Lot's wife and look back at the world and its enticements. Let's keep our hand to the plow and spend our lives like Paul looking to present every person complete in Christ.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary I want to read these verses to you in the Phillips' translation: **"So, naturally, we proclaim Christ. We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about Him, so that, if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ. This is what I am working at all the time, with all the strength that God gives me."**<sup>10</sup>

If we as a church body are going to grow in the area of discipleship than we are going to need to spend more time with Christ. We are going to need to be faithful to admonish and teach in all wisdom. We are going to need a growing concern for the maturity of other believers. And we are going to need to give our best effort, knowing that it is God who gives us the strength.

May we all be able to reach the end of our life and say like Paul in **2 Timothy 4:7–8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.**

#### BENEDICTION

**Hebrews 13:20–21 (NASB95) — 20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

<sup>10</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2000.