

You may not be able to tell over the last few days, but spring is right around the corner, and that means lots of activity in the lawn and garden. Now, I'm not much of a green thumb but I am all about our lawn. I want it green and lush and full and mature, and I know what you put in the soil determines how healthy the lawn will be. I know this because I've seen it go well and not so well.

One year I used the wrong fertilizer for my type of grass, and it didn't grow at all until the middle of summer. You went down our street to beautiful lawn after beautiful lawn and then sort of stumble upon the eye sore that was the Pressler's front yard. Another year I had a patch of dirt that needed some new grass, so I bought and planted some seed. The problem? It was the wrong seed. Within a few weeks I had two different grasses growing in my yard. Looked real classy! So, over the years, I've learned the hard way that if I want a full and mature lawn, I need to treat it with the right stuff.

What is true of our lawns is also true of our spiritual lives. If we want a full and mature relationship with Jesus, we need to seed and feed our soul with the right stuff. But for many of us, we're not sure what the right stuff is, or we willingly fill ourselves up with the wrong stuff from the wrong sources, and the results are ugly. Our growth is stunted, intimacy with our Lord is limited, our community is divided, and our mission is compromised. This is what was at risk in Colossae 2,000 years ago so Paul tells them what needs to be planted in them, and us, in order to grow in Christ.

**[Colossians 1:24-27] <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.**

Last week Paul showed that Jesus was enough as Lord and Savior. Here he begins to show that he is enough to guide our lives in wisdom and knowledge. While we will look at this passage as the recipients of his teaching, let us also keep in mind that we also have a calling to pass this on to one another as well.

Paul is speaking of his ministry and begins with what could be a confusing statement about Christ's afflictions. At first glance it seems like Paul is saying Jesus' work on the cross wasn't enough. But he's not. In fact, the word Paul uses that gets translated as "sufferings" is never used to describe what Jesus endured. Paul is saying Jesus's mission included suffering and, as members of his body, we too will experience suffering. Our suffering does not add to what was achieved on the cross. It is enough. It is evidence we belong to him and, as we continue the mission he began, we can expect the share in the sufferings of Christ.

So then what is Paul's mission? By the calling of God, Paul's God-given purpose is to make the word of God fully known. This is the all-sufficient source of our growth as believers. The false teachers in Colossae said there was a knowledge and wisdom apart from Christ that was

necessary to know in order to live a full life (notice the theme of fullness throughout letter). But Paul says **the word of God is enough to know and grow in God.**

The word Paul is called to make known is God's rich, glorious, eternal purpose of salvation, which is Christ in you and you in Christ. Before Jesus, it had been a mystery. When we read "mystery" in the New Testament it most often means something kept hidden in Old Testament times but now revealed in and through Christ. The Old Testament promised a Messiah to come to redeem Israel. The mystery was that he would suffer, die, and rise again to fulfill that promise, and his salvation would extend to all people, including Gentiles. That mystery was revealed in Christ. He is the sum and substance of all the Old Testament pointed to.

This good news is Christ in us, our hope of glory. This is an already/not yet promise. The moment you trust in Christ, you are forgiven of your sins and reconciled to God, he indwells you by his Spirit, his life flows in your life, you are made new, and given a new identity. That's the "already". The "not yet" part is this promise of future glory. Because he indwells us, he is the guarantee (down payment) of an eternity where we will be raised from the dead, just like he was, to live eternally with him.

Additionally, when you put your faith in Jesus, you immediately belong to a new people called the Body of Christ, which is the Church. In the Old Testament, God's people was Israel. But in Christ, what was once a mystery is now revealed that God would be creating a new, united people, made up of Jews and Gentiles. The reconciliation between God and man and is now realized between men. We are a people brought together in him.

If Jesus gives you life, defines who you are, how you are to live, and eventually where you will wind up, it is riches of that message, God's Word, that must not only inform our lives, but be primary in governing and growing it.

So with what you are you being filled? We are all containers getting filled up by something. And there is no shortage of what the world considers wisdom, knowledge, and insight to inform and guide our lives. Talking heads on the news whose intent is to stir us up, social media which intends for us to get lost in endless feeds, memes, cancel culture, Marxist and nationalist ideology, a false gospel that says God really just wants you to be happy or one that says if you have enough faith, you'll be healed, enriched. Everything we consume yields some kind of growth, and we often need to look at the output to fully understand what the inputs are. What are the results of your life? Hope, peace, joy, fulfillment? Or discontentment, anger, division, fear, anxiety? This week, evaluate what proclamations, what words, you are letting in. Discern who you are listening to. Are they giving you the riches of Jesus or a false gospel that leaves you anything but full and hopeful? You can tell because of what Paul says next. He tells us the result of God's word being fully known and the process to get there.

**[Colossians 1:28-29] <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.**

The purpose of making the word of God fully known is to present everyone mature in Christ. That word mature, *teleios*, means perfect. Now, we may hear that and think sinless, but it's more the process of being perfected, of being completed as we become more and more like Jesus. **The goal of the believer is not perfection, it's progress.** And while we believe Jesus is enough, we can never say we've come far enough. There's always more room to grow until he perfects us in eternity. Until then, though, **a believer full of the word is one on the way to full maturity.** Knowing God and growing in maturity are inseparable.

How does that happen? Paul uses two words: warning and teaching, admonition and addition. Both are vital as the word of God is proclaimed to us. Teaching adds to and deepens what we know. It's God's word pouring into you to make you full. Think about a pitcher of water. The more you pour in, the more full it becomes. But that by itself isn't enough because sometimes the pitcher has a hole in it. You can keep pouring water into it, but it will never get full. If you have a hole in your understanding of God's Word, who Jesus is, and how he calls you to live, we can keep adding proclamations, but that hole will keep you from getting full and maturing.

That's where warning comes in. Warning tells us who we are and what is going to happen if we are not in Christ. But, after we have trusted in him, admonition is the correction we need to clarify truth and correct action. I want to show you an example of that.

Wordle has taken the world by storm the last few weeks. Every preacher in America has been trying to figure out how to work it into a sermon illustration, and today is that day for Fellowship Dallas! As you may know, the goal of the game is to guess a five-letter word. You begin with any five-letter word and the game tells you one of three things: green means right letter right place, yellow means right letter wrong place, and gray means the letter is not part of the word. With each guess, you are corrected, not to make you feel bad, but to get you to the right answer.

We hear correction and admonition and might bristle. No one wants to be called out. But, like Wordle, loving correction is a good thing. It brings us to clarity, shows us what is wrong in our beliefs and actions and what needs to be changed in order to live the full, mature life Jesus wants for us.

Now, we hear proclamation, teaching, etc. and may think it's just the passing on of information, but it's more than that. We can sit and listen to someone teach us the word of God every weekend for the rest of our lives and it make little difference. If we want to mature, we've got to let it change our lives. Throughout the letter Paul talks about **knowledge and wisdom**. Knowledge is truth understood. Wisdom is the application of that truth. We need both for us to grow. **Information (Knowledge) + Application (Wisdom) = Transformation (Maturity).** If you want to grow, you must understand the Word and apply it to your life.

How much do you expose yourself to the proclamation of God's word? Said negatively, it is impossible to be mature in your faith while being biblically illiterate. Paul speaks of the riches of Christ, but we too often settle for being Christian paupers. Said positively, the more we know, the more we can grow. Without fail, every person I talk to who is growing in their faith includes their growing understanding of God's Word as the catalyst because it's there where we grow in our understanding of who he is, who we are in him, and how to live a full life in light of that.

So what is your plan? It begins with self-study, because when you have God's Spirit, you never study by yourself. Sundays, Men's and Women's Bible studies, How to Read the Bible, Life Group curriculum. Wherever you are today is ok. God just doesn't want you to stay there, and he's the one who will take you where he wants you to go. But as we go, look at the context in which we are to do so.

**[Colossians 2:1-5] For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.**

Our journey towards maturity is one we cannot take on our own. Our faith is a team sport, a family affair, and it's only when we are rooted in love that we can comprehend the word of God, which is Christ. Unity is two-fold. It's unity of hearts, our love for one another, but it's also unity of head, what we believe. It's why our Covenant for membership starts with our beliefs because a community divided over truth won't last very long. That's why a large denomination is splitting. A truth, God is love, is being turned on its head to justify behavior that goes against God's word. A body divided over truth will struggle to love one another. And a body that struggles to love one another will struggle to grow together through the revelation of God's Word.

So Paul writes to encourage us and to call us to unity. As we love and serve one another, we model the love of Christ and help each other know him more. And as we study God's Word together, the truth of Christ unites our hearts together. There's that great CS Lewis quote when he talks about his two friends whom he used to spend a lot of time with. One of them passed away and Lewis, while saying he would miss him, said he'd also miss that guy's view on the other friend living, because he knew the other friend better through him. It's the same way with Jesus. I can know Jesus well through the reading of his Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. **But I can know Jesus even more when I see how you know him.** And as we learn and love in unity, what we believe about Jesus is grown and confirmed, so when false "plausible arguments" come, we can assure one another that Jesus is enough and that, in him and his Word are all the treasures of God's knowledge and wisdom that lead to a mature and full life. Don't go it alone.

Every day in the Christian life is like the beginning of spring, because God wants to grow something new. So, what are you going to plant this spring? What are you going to use to let God mature you in your faith? Who are you going to do it with? This is treasure of God's Word given to you. Let's put it to work and become the people he wants to make us.