

Colossians 1:24-29 Study Questions

In chapter 1, Paul has greeted the church at Colossae and offered thanksgiving and prayers for their "love, faith and hope" towards God's people. (Col. 1:1-14) He then celebrated Christ's supremacy over everything in the "Christ Hymn" applying Jesus's cosmic redemptive work specifically to the believers at Colossae. (Col. 1:15-23) Now, Paul is writing to authenticate his apostleship, authority and labor towards the nations (Col. 1:24-29).

Paul's enemies made much of the fact that the great apostle was a prisoner of Rome possibly facing execution. The false teachers in Colossae probably ridiculed Paul and used this as a weapon to fight the truth of the gospel. But Paul rejoices. Despite his imprisonment, he is laboring for the Colossian church and warning them against false teaching. God's work has the same pattern from beginning to end. The pattern of salvation is the same pattern for the spread of the gospel. Jesus suffered so that others would reach glory, therefore Paul must suffer to spread the gospel.

That is the normal pattern of gospel ministry. God uses suffering to save others. That should be what we expect. (Matthew 5:11-12, 2 Timothy 3:12) Serving others sometimes is smooth sailing, but mostly it is hard painful work. However, that doesn't mean it's not effective or that things are not going according to plan.

It's easy for Christians to take for granted that the gospel is for everyone regardless of ethnic origin. But when the gospel first burst upon the scene of history, such a concept was new and even scandalous. The Jewish nation of Israel had been the people of God for centuries. The rest of the peoples of the world were outside the covenants of God and considered unclean, sinful, and cut off from God. (Compare Matt. 18:17; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 2:11-12) However, the Old Testament promised that one day the Gentiles would seek God and become full members of his people. (e.g., Isa. 2:2-3; 19:23-25; Zech. 2:10-11) These promises found their fulfillment in Christ.

This was Paul's charge. This was his message to make Jesus known "to [God's] saints... among the Gentiles." (Col. 1:26b-27)

As we have gone through Colossians, we have seen that the Gospel is spreading throughout the world and is reconciling all things to Jesus Christ. The Gospel is powerful and incredible. Yet when we look at the world around us it doesn't always feel that way. It often feels like the darkness is overcoming the light and the gospel is not advancing. This can be discouraging. But as I write this, I want to encourage you with the revival that is happening at Asbury College in Wilmore, KY. Amidst all that may be happening in the world today, be encouraged... **the gospel is still advancing.**

Reflect on the following questions:

1. God gave Paul a unique ministry in the history of the Christian movement. Paul's distinctive role as an apostle consists in suffering as "the means God uses to extend the message of the gospel to others." Look at v.24. How is Paul suffering? (Col. 4:10, 4:18) Why does He rejoice in his sufferings? What perspective would we need to rejoice like him when we suffer or face setbacks? How can we see suffering more as God sees it?

2. Paul's statement that he is "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" seems at first glance to imply that Christ's death on the cross was somehow inadequate for the salvation of the Church. From the evidence in the letter itself, how do we know that this is not what Paul meant? (Col. 1:20-23)

3. Read v.25-27. God's "mystery" (or secret) is now out. He could use any means to spread His gospel. Yet He seems to use the "weak" in human eyes, to spread the gospel. Why do you think He uses weak, suffering human beings to do it? With the many mighty forces in our world today (consumerism, secularism, atheism, the liberal media etc.), sometimes it can feel like David versus Goliath. Share some of your weaknesses and how you could see God using those as a strength for His glory.

4. This mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Jesus Christ, who creates all things and reconciles all things to Himself, is now dwelling in us. And He gives us an eternal hope far beyond comparison with anything in this world. When we chew on what Christ is doing within us, and what is awaiting us, we will be kept from discouragement. Why is this mystery so precious and valuable? What excites you about this change? How does knowing the value of this mystery protect us from getting discouraged?

5. Read v 28. Reflect and define (in your own words) "proclaim, warning and teaching." What do you think happens when churches neglect these three? What happens when emphasis is placed only on positive teaching and encouragement (2 Tim 4:3) or only negative warning? How would you describe being mature in Christ?

6. In vv. 28-29 Paul sums up the work he and his ministry team do. The aim is presenting everyone (mentioned 3x) mature/perfect in Christ. The means to this end is by proclaiming Jesus Christ. Those who do this are empowered by Christ.

a) How can your group better work together to reach this aim? Are there new things you could try? (ex: write to missionaries, have dinner together but invite non-Christian friends, join a sports team together to make non-Christian friends etc.)

b) The going will get tough. What will Jesus do to keep us going?

c) What part does God play in the preaching of the gospel, and what part do His servants play? How might this change the way you think about evangelism?