

Paul's Passion for the Church

Steve Lewis - www.SpiritAndTruth.org

(Colossians 1:24-2:5)

Recall in the first session of this series we saw how Paul was made a minister when Christ commissioned Paul as His special representative or apostle to the Gentiles (see Acts chapters 9, 13, 22, and 26). Paul spent the next 30 years of his life carrying out his God-given mission to spread the gospel, during which he suffered many things. As Paul begins this section, he says:

Col 1:24 – Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Even in the midst of imprisonment, Paul is rejoicing. **Sufferings** is the Greek word *pathēma* which means “mistreatment or hardship.” Paul adds that his sufferings have been **for your sake**. His mistreatment has been on their behalf to benefit them. “**I do my share**” and “**in filling up**” are actually a single word in Greek, *antanaplēroō*, which is a rare double compound word from *plēroō* (to fill) which means “to fill up in turn.” Paul is saying that it is now **his turn** in **filling up** or carrying forward what Jesus said would happen (John 15:18-20).

Afflictions (*thlipsis*) means “pressure or trouble.” It is never used in Scripture to describe the suffering of Christ on the cross. Paul had clearly taught that nothing was lacking in Christ's accomplishment on the cross, so here Paul cannot be saying that there is something lacking in Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf. But there were other pressures and troubles that Christ experienced during His earthly ministry.

The word **lacking** is the Greek term *husterēma* which means “what follows behind or is yet lacking.” This takes us back to recall Jesus' final words to His disciples in the upper room: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have **tribulation** (the same Greek word, *thlipsis*), but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Paul says that his sufferings are **in my flesh**. Paul's many mistreatments resulted in fleshly scars that were visible all over his body. Paul made it clear that he was not doing this for his own benefit, but **on behalf of Christ's body, which is the church**. As Jesus said to Paul while on his way to Damascus to continue persecuting the Church, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). To afflict the Church is to afflict Christ.

Col 1:25 – Of [this church] I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the [preaching of] the word of God,

In this verse Paul elaborates on what he had said in verse 23, that he had been **made a minister** of the gospel. Here he says that his appointment was **according to the stewardship**

from God. The word **stewardship** is the Greek word *oikonomia* which means “economy, administration, or the method of operating something.” It carries the idea of the obligation, responsibility, and authority to manage things. Paul was given a special stewardship over the Church which was **for your benefit**. Literally it was focused toward or into the Church, for establishing it and building it up in the faith.

The final phrase literally says, “**to complete the word of God.**” The words “**fully carry out**” are translating the Greek word *plēroō* which means “to fill to the top so that nothing is lacking for a full measure.” This was the apostle Paul’s primary mission. He was faithfully proclaiming the message of Christ’s work on our behalf.

Col 1:26 – [that is,] the mystery which has been hidden from the [past] ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

There was information which God had kept hidden from past generations, but He was now making this information publicly known to His saints through the apostle Paul. The Greek word **mystery** (*mustērion*) is something “**which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints.**” In other words, a mystery is a truth that was hidden or unrevealed in the Old Testament. God kept some of His plans secret until the proper time for them to be revealed.

The ancient “mystery religions” carefully guarded their secrets. Their knowledge was only to be shared among the initiates, and they were promised salvation through their secret rituals. A vow of silence restricted them from sharing any information with those outside. Many of these mystery religions were actively practiced in Paul’s day, and some people in the Colossian church may have been rescued out of that dominion of darkness.

But the New Testament definition of **mystery** is simply a truth that was previously unrevealed by God but which He has now shared by revealing it to His apostles and prophets. The revealed truth is publicly available to all, just as God offers salvation to all through the reconciling work of Christ on the cross.

Col 1:27 – to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In the last verse the mystery **has been manifested to His saints.** **Manifested** is the Greek word *phaneroō* which means to bring something to light and to make it clear. Here in verse 27 he says that **God willed to make known** this mystery. The word **willed** means that God intended, planned, or determined to do this at exactly the right time.

To **make known** (*gnōrizō*) carries the idea of declaring or revealing something in order to make it fully known. Paul says that God made known the **riches** of the **glory** of this mystery. **Riches** is the Greek word *ploutos* which means “wealth, abundance, plenty.” And **glory** is the Greek word *doxa* which means “resulting in praise and honor to God.” All of the things we have in Christ bring us a glorious abundance beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.

Paul tells us that it is being offered to the **Gentiles**. The new truth which God is revealing through the apostle Paul is expressed in just a few simple words in this verse. Paul writes: “**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**” Christ dwells within us by His Spirit. Here Paul calls this the **hope of glory**. If all we have is Jesus, we have all we need both for today and for the glorious future.

Col 1:28 – We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Paul explains how he carries out his mission, as well as what his goal is for all the believers. First, he **proclaims Him**. This is the Greek word *kataggellō* which means to announce (*aggellō*) throughout (*kata*) or “to proclaim far and wide.” This is Paul’s ministry of publicly declaring or making known the truths about Christ and what He accomplished to reconcile the world to God.

Next, he **admonishes every man**. This is the Greek word *noutheteō* which means “to put in mind;” to warn or admonish someone gently. First people need to know the facts about the work of Christ on our behalf, and then they need to understand the consequences for failing to accept and act on those facts.

Then, he **teaches every man**. This is the Greek word *didaskō* which means “to instruct or deliver information.” The truths of the faith or the content of biblical doctrine are carefully presented to every believer. Paul says he does this **with all wisdom**, meaning that he teaches in a practical way which helps the learner to understand and apply the teaching to their lives.

Finally, Paul’s goal for this work is **so that we may present every man complete in Christ**. Here Paul uses the same word he used in verse 22 when he said that Christ will “present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” The Greek word *paristēmi* means to “place beside or to bring close.”

The word **complete** is the Greek word *teleios* which carries the idea of something having reached its final goal or its full expression of maturity. This is what Paul was praying for in Colossians 1:9-12. He wants them to grow in spiritual maturity through the teaching ministry which he and others have been given for the Church.

Three times Paul repeated the phrase “**every man**” to emphasize that every person is offered the reconciliation that Christ procured by His death on the cross. Christianity is not another obscure mystery religion or secret cult into which only a few are allowed membership.

Col 1:29 – For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Here Paul explains what energizes him as he labors and strives. The Greek word for **labor** (*kopiaō*) means “to grow weary from toil or exhausted with wearisome effort.” **Striving** is the Greek word *agōnizomai* which means “to contend with adversaries; to struggle with difficulties and dangers.”

Paul was not laboring and striving in his own strength, but he relied on **His power** which **mightily works within me**. In Colossians 1:11 Paul had prayed for the Colossians that they would be “**strengthened with all power**” using the Greek word *dunamis*. We saw that verse could literally be translated “powered with all power.” Here we again see (literally) **His power which powerfully works within me**. The Greek word **works** is *energeō* from which we get our English word *energy*. Paul is presenting himself as an for living in the strength that God provides.

Col 2:1 – For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

Paul wants them to know that they matter to the Church at large. **Struggle** is the Greek word *agōn* which means “an inward contest of anxiety” for the church at Colossae. And not only for them, but for the believers in Laodicea and the whole Lycus Valley. These were people to whom Paul had not personally ministered, but Paul’s concern is analogous to the care that a grandfather might have for his grandchildren. He is concerned that his lineage would continue on a firm foundation of the truths of the faith.

Col 2:2 – that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and [attaining] to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, [resulting] in a true knowledge of God's mystery, [that is,] Christ [Himself,]

He wants their hearts to be **encouraged** (*parakaleō*) which means “to call alongside to help”. One of the most encouraging things about the Colossian believers is that their hearts are **knit together in love**. This expresses the Greek word *sumbibazō* which means “to push together or unite in affection.” We know from Colossians 1:4 that they were already demonstrating this type of love for all the saints.

Paul also desires that they experience **all the wealth** that comes from understanding the truths of the faith. This is the same word he had used in 1:27 when he talked of the riches of the mystery. He uses the Greek word *ploutos* again which means “wealth, abundance, or plenty.”

This sense of abundance results from **full assurance**, which is the Greek word *plērophoria*. It means “perfect certainty or complete conviction.” Paul goes on to say **full assurance of understanding** (*sunesis*), which is the word he used in Colossians 1:9 when he prayed for their “spiritual wisdom and **understanding**.” One other thing that Paul had prayed in Colossians 1:9 is amplified here when Paul adds, “[**resulting**] in a true knowledge of God's mystery.” **True knowledge** is the Greek word *epignōsis* which we saw previously. It means “thoroughly understanding, recognizing the importance, accepting and applying something personally.”

Col 2:3 – in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

At the end of the previous verse Paul abbreviated the **mystery** he previously revealed in Colossians 1:27 by simply saying, **Christ**, and here he explains what he means.

People in Paul's day were craving some kind of hidden or secret knowledge, but Paul says, "If you have **Christ** then you have all the treasures of **wisdom** (*sophia*) and **knowledge** (*gnosis*)." The word **treasures** is the Greek word *thēsauros* which means "the place in which precious things are laid up and valuables are kept." Christ is our treasury because in Him we have all of the riches and wealth and abundance that we could even need.

Col 2:4 – I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

Paul had already commended the Colossians for their faithfulness to the **word of truth, the gospel**. It was constantly **bearing fruit and increasing** as they were growing in their knowledge of Christ toward full spiritual maturity. Here Paul warns them that there may come a time when others might try to deceive them with persuasive arguments intended to lead them away from the truths they had come to believe and follow.

Delude is the Greek word *paralogizomai* which means "to deceive by false reasoning." Traveling orators and philosophers were common in Paul's day. **Persuasive argument** is a single Greek word (*pithanologia*) which means "persuasiveness of speech, specious discourse which leads listeners into error." Paul will spend more time discussing this issue in the upcoming sections, but here we see the first hint that trouble may be on the horizon for the Colossians.

Col 2:5 – For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Paul reassures the Colossians that even though he is not physically present with them, he is with them in spirit to do everything he can to encourage them, warn them, and build them up in the faith. He also commended them for two important things.

First, he rejoices **to see their good discipline**. **Good discipline** is the single Greek word *taxis* which means an orderly arrangement, and carries the idea of proper order or a well-regulated life. Paul commends them for the positive and orderly way in which they are conducting their lives and their church activities.

Next, Paul commends the **stability of their faith in Christ**. **Stability** is the Greek word *stereōma* which means "strong, solid, or stable." He is saying that the Colossians are well established in their faith, their knowledge, and their trust in Christ. This is a wonderful affirmation of the strength and stability of the believers in Colossae. In the next session we will hear more about Paul's warnings to the Colossians regarding possible threats to their faith.