

“Paul’s Ministry”
June 11, 2017
Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

I. Introduction

The best way to negate or discredit a message is to discredit the messenger, and that’s just what those against Paul and the Gospel tried to do. Paul’s enemies throughout the known world made much of the fact that this so-called “Great Apostle” was a prisoner of Rome. And the false teachers in Colossae would have used that same argument—they probably ridiculed Paul and used his imprisonment as a weapon in their fight against the truth of the Gospel. Since Paul had never been in Colossae, many there didn’t know him personally. Some may have never even heard him speak. So as he prepared to refute the false teachings, Paul needed to establish his authority and his credentials.

Paul wanted to restore the Colossian’s confidence in their hope in the Gospel and to arm them theologically against the arguments of the wolves, the false teachers, that had come into the flock. In today’s Scripture, Paul gave reasons why what he taught wasn’t his own opinion but the Word of God. In the first verse of Colossians, Paul identified himself as **“an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”** But in order that the Colossian Christians would accept what he had to say, Paul went into more detail as he listed a variety of aspects of his ministry. He began with his afflictions.

II. Paul’s Ministry

A His Afflictions Rather than being ashamed of his trials and tribulations—his afflictions, Paul wrote, **“I rejoice in what was suffered for you.”** Contrary to what others taught—and still teach today, being a Christian meant that one could expect suffering. In fact in **John 15:20** Jesus said, **“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”** In **2 Timothy 3:12** we read, **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** Paul gave three reasons for his rejoicing in the midst of suffering.

1. First, Paul rejoiced because he was suffering for His Lord, Jesus Christ. Like the early Apostles in [Acts 5:41](#), Paul rejoiced that he” **had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”** Turn to [1 Peter 4:15-16](#). Paul was suffering in prison because of Jesus Christ. Paul was able to rejoice in affliction because he was suffering as a Christian. Imprisoned in Rome, while other preachers got the glory, he wrote in [Philippians 1:18](#), **“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.”** The early church considered it a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ—in [Philippians 1:29](#), Paul wrote, **“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.”**

2. Second, Paul wrote that he was able to rejoice because he was suffering for the Gentiles. God had appointed Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles. Turn to the story of Paul’s conversion—[turn to Acts 9:15-16](#). In fact, Paul was a prisoner in Rome because of his love for the Gentiles. In [Acts, chapters 21 & 22](#), we read that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges about his dealings with Gentiles. The Jews listened to his defense until he used the word *Gentiles*. It was that word that infuriated the Jews and drove them to demand his execution. Paul was able to rejoice because he trusted that his sufferings would result in the salvation of some and that for others his sufferings would make their faith stronger. Paul’s joy came from his willingness to lose his life for others.

3. A third reason for Paul’s rejoicing is that he suffered for the sake of Christ’s body, the church. Earlier, before he became a follower of Jesus Christ, Paul had persecuted the church, but now he devoted his life to the care of the church. The sufferings he experienced were intended for Christ; as Christ’s representative, as the church’s voice, Paul received them instead. In his ministry Paul didn’t ask, *“What do I get out of it?”* Instead he asked, *“How much will God let me put into it?”* The fact that Paul was a prisoner did not stop him from ministering to the church, including this Letter to the Colossians.

B. His Commission Paul then reminded them of the commission God had given him. Paul didn't volunteer to become a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, God had chosen him on the road to Damascus—turn to a different account of his conversion, turn to Acts 26:12-19. Wisely, Paul accepted God's commission—as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, “For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”

Colossians 1:26 says that Paul's message to the Gentiles had to do with “the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.” Here the word “mystery” refers to a secret once hidden but which has now been revealed and understood. The mystery is that today God is uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church. Before Christ's Incarnation—His life, death, and resurrection, Gentiles had been excluded from the glory and riches of God's grace. But that was no longer true, now Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by faith in Jesus Christ—turn to Romans 10:12-13. Like our commission today, Paul's commission was to “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

C. His Method Next we see Paul's method. Paul's method of carrying out his commission was to “proclaim him, i.e. Jesus Christ, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom.” *Proclaim* means to publically declare or announce a completed truth or happening. Paul preached wherever he went and his preaching included two parts: admonishing and teaching. First, by *admonishing*, Paul was warning the people about sin and coming punishment. Second, *teaching* was prompting others to make a choice, giving instructions in how to live a Christian life, and encouraging others to continue to grow and reach out to others. Warning people isn't enough, the basic truths of the Christian life must also be taught; otherwise, people will return to their old ways.

But admonishing and teaching must be done “with all wisdom.” Wisdom is the right use of knowledge, i.e. understanding Biblical principles for holy living and conduct, applying biblical truths to daily living. The false teachers promised to give people a “*hidden wisdom*” that would make them “*spiritually elite*.” But all true spiritual wisdom is found in only Jesus Christ and is for everyone who believes not just those with special knowledge or advanced educations.

D. His Goal Finally, we see that Paul’s goal of preaching, warning and teaching was to “present everyone perfect in Christ.” To be “perfect in Christ” means to be maturing or growing as a Christian, i.e. to be more Christ-like. The way to maturity is by reading and studying God’s Word—turn to [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#).

Paul wrote “to this end I labor.” In the Greek, the word translated “*labor*” means to “*work to the point of exhaustion*.” The point is that no one can successfully serve Jesus Christ without working hard. Lazy pastors, Christian leaders, or laypeople will never fulfill the ministry the Lord has called them to. Paul emphasized this effort when he used the word *struggling* from which we get our word *agonize*. In other words, success in serving the Lord, like success in sports or any other activity, demands maximum effort. Success in serving the Lord demands maximum effort.

Notice that Paul wrote that this agonizing labor is “with all his, i.e. Jesus Christ’s, energy, which so powerfully works in me.” God gave Paul the strength to work hard at his ministry whether it’s for the churches he helped establish or churches established by others like the churches at Colossae and Laodicea. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them-- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” ([1 Corinthians 15:10](#)).

In [verses 2 and 3 of Colossians 2](#) Paul then gave some evidences of spiritual maturity, i.e. particular goals of preaching, warning, and teaching or growing as a Christian. First, there was “that

they may be encouraged of heart.” The Colossians were being attacked by false teachers, one of the goals of Paul’s preaching was to strength their hearts against the lies they were hearing—as

Ephesians 6:14 says, that they would “stand firm.”

A second indicator of spiritual maturity is being “united in love.” Believers share a common life with love—agape love—as its basis. All believers possess the same eternal life, all come to Christ in the same way, and all are placed into the Body of Christ by the same Spirit. As we read in Romans 10, Galatians 3:28 also says that “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Loving someone is not defined by having warm feelings toward them, but by meeting their needs. As the Colossian Christians were being attacked from within and from without the church, they needed to continue to support one another.

A third indicator is having “the full riches of complete understanding.” Without a complete understanding, believers cannot enjoy all the blessings that are theirs in Christ. Through understanding, Christians are able to apply biblical principles to daily life. This understanding is the exclusive domain of Christians because, as 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”

Considering what they were going through, Paul emphasized the need for their understanding to include “the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” At the center of their understanding, they needed to have a settled conviction about Christ’s deity and His pre-eminence and His sufficiency—in John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Light. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus alone is sufficient. Jesus is the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. There is no need for the

writings of any cult, philosophy, or psychology to supplement the Bible. Jesus is the source of all true spiritual knowledge. It was paramount that they have a right understanding of Jesus Christ, “so that no-one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” All believers need to be certain of Christ’s deity and sufficiency to be able to withstand the attacks of false teachings

Having warned the Colossians to continue to stand firm, Paul rejoiced that they were doing so. Although “absent in body” due to his imprisonment, Paul was present with them in spirit. Their orderliness and firmness and faith in Christ caused him to rejoice.

III. Conclusion

These aspects or characteristics of Paul’s ministry should be found in every believer. All Christians serve Christ in some capacity. Like Paul and the rest of the Apostles, each one of us does have a God-given ministry—some of you will be exercising that ministry this week in VBS. We can share the Gospel with others and be soul-winners. We can work hard—even agonize—for Christ and fulfill the ministry God has given us. We can spend time in prayer for God’s people and encourage them to mature. It doesn’t mean we need to deal with a lot of people—Paul took time to minister to individuals; Jesus only had 12 disciples; we may be a small church but if we minister to only a few believers, we are helping the entire Christian church.

The church should be a place of hope, good cheer, and encouragement, the place where people recognize the areas of growth in our lives and help us continue to grow in our Christian walk. The church should be the place where we are strengthened for daily battle in the midst of a world of despair and hopelessness, and the place where we do the same for others.

Paul’s message to the Colossians and to us today is found in [Philippians 4:9](#): “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Are you fulfilling your God-given ministry?

