

Colossians 1:24-29
9/13/2020
The Mystery - Christ

Open your Bibles, please to Colossians chapter 1..... I will read from verse 24 through verse 29....

Paul's Ministry to the Church

²⁴ 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, ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Last week, we examined Paul's calling to the ministry, his suffering for the ministry, his stewardship of the ministry, today without any major introduction, I want to focus our attention on how Paul fulfilled His stewardship....How Paul fulfilled His calling.....

We saw from Acts 9, last week that Paul was a chosen instrument of the Lord's to go to the Gentiles, and he would also speak to Kings and to Jews.... But his primary emphasis was to be to Gentiles.... Those who were non Jewish....

And I would like to think, if you asked Paul, "How do you plan on carrying out what God called you to do? How are you going to carry out your stewardship?"

I think based on this text, His answer would be, "I will fulfill the stewardship God gave me by making the word of God fully known." That is what verse 25 states..... Then he would go on to add that this is the only way that he can present everyone mature in Christ, which comes from verse 28.....

To say it another way, he would say, "I want to present every person complete or mature in Christ, and I will see that accomplished as I make the Word of God fully known."

From here, as he continues in this chapter, he very helpfully explains what he means by making the Word of God fully known.....

First, in verse 26, he is going to declare the mystery that has been hidden and now is revealed..... Second, in verse 28, he is going to proclaim Christ.....third, He is going to warn..... and, finally. He is going to teach.....

His entire life and ministry will be centered on declaring God's Word and focusing on Christ..... and this will lead to the maturity of those in His care.....

And, notice how far reaching this ministry is for making the word of God fully known..... Paul uses the word “everyone” 3 times in verse 28..... he is going to warn everyone... he is going to teach everyone.... And he is going to present everyone mature in Christ..... This is what wakes him up in the morning..... this is what keeps him up at night..... this is what drives him....

In fact, he tells us this in verse 29..... “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Notice the adjectives he uses to describe his effort “toil – it means to work hard..... it is the word Peter used when he told the Lord they had worked all night and caught nothing..... has the idea of long intensive labor.....”

struggling – means to make every effort.... From the greek Word agonidzomai.... What does that sound like?.... Agonize..... It is a term used for athletes in their training..... It is hard work....Paul is working night and day, with great, agonizing effort to be sure that he does his job to make the Word of God fully known in order to present every person under his care mature or complete in Christ....

Now, the great news is that he is not alone..... The last part of verse 29 states, struggling “with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”¹

Paul is using all of his own effort or toil or struggle..... but he is tapped into a resource that is infinite.... He is struggling, but he is plugged in to an energy source that is outside of him....We know that Christ lives in and through us by His Spirit; and He is the One we rely on.... He is the one who works in and through us.....

And, I know this to be true..... So often, as I prepare to make the Word of God fully known to you and I am studying something I am stuck on.... I do cry out to God... I do ask Him to open my blind eyes to behold wonderful things from your law.... I do cry out and say, “Lord, the people that come to Grace Fellowship are your people... they are your saints.... I am here to serve you by preaching Your word to them..... And I need your help... I am lost in this text... I do not know what it means..... I am weary, I am tired... I need your help and strength to help me get ready for Sunday morning.....”

And, He helps me.....It is remarkable how he helps me.... Sometimes I wonder, “Lord, why didn’t you help me to see this last Tuesday, instead of opening my eyes on Saturday night, so I have to redo some of my sermon on Sunday morning?” He, very subtly answers..... “I wanted you to agonize, struggle, and toil..... Rick, I want you to need me; rely on me, not yourself....”

1 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 1:29). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

What a wonderful way Paul shows our responsibility to work hard, as we rely on God to work in and through us....the word powerfully is from the Greek word dunamis... which is where we get our word dynamite.... We work, but we are tapped in to, we abide in, we rely on, we trust in God's dynamite power to work in and through us... so, we are not alone....

And, I honestly think that any and every pastor, and any and every ministry should be following Paul's example..... Rick, what is it that drives you? What is it that you believe God has called you to? "Make the Word of God fully known..... in order to present everyone mature in Christ..."

Notice first, that For Paul, making the word of God fully known begins with explaining a mystery that was hidden and has now been revealed..... He writes in verse 26

"the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints."

This word mystery is used nearly 30 times in the New Testament, and it really means something that was there, but kept hidden..... it is not that it did not exist and now it does exist..... it has always existed, but was not fully revealed.....So, It is not so secret that there were no clues about it..... the clues were there, but hidden well enough that most people did not fully understand it.....

The fact that it was hidden for ages.....and for generations..... means that throughout the OT, there were clues and hints and references to it.... but it was not fully disclosed...

and, here is the mystery in verse 27.....²⁷To 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."

The mystery in one sentence is that Christ will now be proclaimed to the nations.... Not just to Jews..... The gospel will now be preached to every people group..... The glorious riches of Christ will now be made known to the Gentiles.....

Christ, by His Spirit, will now live in and through people from all nations, all tongues, tribes, and languages.....

Now, this is not the only letter that Paul makes this clear..... turn to Ephesians 3 for a moment... I will read from verse 1

"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ²assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons

of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ²”

Verse 6 is a clear explanation of what Paul is saying in Colossians 1.... “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The Gentiles are fellow heirs..... they receive the same promises..... and they are part of the same body, the church..... There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile..... Christ is all in all..... because of the good news that Christ came for the nations....

It is hard for us to think of this the way a person in the first century would think of it..... in the first century the world was divided up between Jews and Gentiles or Jews and non-Jews.... Or Jews and everyone else.....

We think we have racial issues in our day..... some of you who are older remember the race riots in the 60’s..... none of us were here when slavery was legal.... I wonder if any of us experienced the days when there were white bathrooms and colored bathrooms....

But, racial issues have been part of our world, not just in the United States, but all over the world on every continent and in every century throughout history because we are sinners.... And in the first century, there was no interaction between Jews and Gentiles...

Now remember, in Matthew 28:18, Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.... And in Acts 1, Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth..... It was a command to go outside their Jewish heritage and tell all nations, including Gentiles, about Christ....

By Acts chapter 8, the church had not gone outside its Jewish boundaries.... And it was not until God brought persecution to the church that the gospel began to spread outside Jerusalem..... Notice Acts 8 verse 4... this is on the heels of what we read last week when Paul was part of persecuting Christians.....

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ³”

Samaria was full of non-Jews.... In fact they were half Jew, half Gentile, and the average Jew wanted nothing to do with them..... and Phillip was one of the first followers of Christ to bring the gospel outside the walls of his Jewish upbringing..... later in Acts 8 verse 26, Philip preaches the gospel to an Ethiopian....

2 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 3:1–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

3 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 8:4–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

But, if God had not intervened and scattered the believers through persecution, they would not have obeyed Him and brought the gospel to those of non Jewish descent..... This mystery of Christ for the nations would not have taken place...

It is in Acts 10 where we see how big the dividing wall was between Jew and Gentile..... Go ahead and turn there....

In verses 1-8 we are introduced to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius who the angel of the Lord tells to send to Joppa for a man named Peter.... The next day, Peter has a vision, he falls into a trance, he sees heaven open and all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds come down in a sheet, **and verse 13 states** that he is told in the heavenly vision, "Rise, Peter, Kill and eat."

Now the food in the sheet, the animals in the sheet were animals that would not have been lawful for a Jew to eat according to the OT dietary laws.... **Look at Peter's answer in verse 14,**

"But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. ⁴"

Now... don't miss that statement, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

Right after Peter's vision, the men that Cornelius sent to get Peter arrived... Peter was perplexed according to verse 17, and notice the middle of verse 19, "the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."⁵

Why would he be told to accompany them without hesitation? Because they were Gentiles.... They were not Jews..... Jews do not travel with Gentiles.... Jews do not associate with Gentiles.....Jews think they are better than Gentiles..... Jews do not like Gentiles.....

Peter follows them, they go all the way back to Cornelius' house, and Cornelius has all of his friends and relatives there, waiting for Peter to come and give them a message from God.... And of course all of his friends and relatives are Gentiles.... After a brief introduction, the lights are turning on for Peter.. notice verse 28

And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me." ⁶

4 [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ac 10:14–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

5 [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ac 10:19–20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

6 [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ac 10:28–29). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

did you hear that? It was against the law for Peter to be in his house.... It was against the law for him to associate with a Gentile..... or visit anyone from another nation..... and through what he experienced when he saw the animals that were not part of the dietary laws come down in the sheet, God showed him he should never call anyone common or unclean.....

Cornelius explains his side of the story.... An angel told him to send for Peter..... and it is here, in the house of this Gentile that God fully opens his eyes to the truth, the mystery that Christ is for the Gentiles, too..... notice verse 34.

“So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”⁷”

And, if you read on further in the chapter, you would see how Peter preached the gospel and the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles just like He did the Jews at pentecost.....

Beloved..... this is the mystery..... that Christ was for the nations.....and now He is living in all those who call upon His name

Now, this mystery of Christ being preached to the Gentiles.....that was hidden was not without clues, all good mysteries have clues that once the mystery is solved, you go back and say..... ‘Oh, yeah... I remember that....’

The mystery Paul is talking about had pictures, types, and shadows of what was to come.....The Jews never saw them..... Sadly, over the centuries they had come to the place that they believed that they were the special ones, they were the annointed ones, they were the ones who were called by God..... you see that so often in the dealings Jesus had with the Pharisees..... they were constantly referring back to Moses through whom they received the commandments..... and constantly referring to Abraham as their Father who they descended from.....

By the time Jesus was born into the world, the scorn for the Gentiles was at it's height.....the Jews considered themselves elite, better, more righteous..... they had the commandments..... they had the prophets..... they had the promises of God..... the only problem was, they did not read these promises carefully..... In fact, turn to Genesis 12..... I want you to see that in the promise God made to Abraham, there is a Gentile reference..... Genesis 12:1.....

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” ⁸

7 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 10:34–35). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

8 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ge 12:1–3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Notice the last phrase..... that last phrase is so crucial because it promises 2 things..... do you know what they are? The "in you" is a reference to the coming Savior who will be a descendent of Abraham..... We know him to be Jesus....

and the "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" is a reference to every tribe, tongue, language, people group.....Now, it is not a huge statement..... it is not big and bold and loud..... it is hidden.....but it is there.... It is a clue..... in the covenant God made with Abraham, it was never to be exclusively Jewish..... but the Jews missed it.....

And, as you peruse your Bible, there are Gentiles, non Jews who come to believing faith interspersed throughout the Scriptures.....And there are actually 4 Gentile women in the Genealogy of Christ..... Rahab the Harlot was a Cannanite.....Tamar, he daughter in law of Judah was a Cannanite, Ruth was a Moabite, And Bethsheba was a Hittite.....

Along with that, Jesus mentioned the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian as examples of believing Gentiles.....The Queen of Sheba came to hear the wisdom of Solomon..... and the entire Gentile city of Ninevah repented at the preaching of Jonah..... Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar came to acknowledge the sovereign greatness of God after God humbled him... And, what about the magi that came from the East led by a star to worship and bring gifts to Jesus....

You see, if the average Jew would have read their bible carefully, they would have seen that Gentiles were included in the Abrahamic covenant..... and confirmed throughout Scripture.....And if it isn't enough to see what I just told you in the narrative literature of the Old Testament..... the Psalms and the prophets are full of verses promising the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles.....often referred to as "the nations,."

Psalms 22:27

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
**and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.**⁹

Isaiah 61:11

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
**so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations.**¹⁰

⁹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ps 22:27). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Is 61:11). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Now, though there were Gentiles who came to faith, and an entire city came faith, there were kings who came to faith..... there **was not** an active, ongoing outreach to the Gentiles until the Messiah, until Christ came, died, rose again and commissioned his disciples to go and bring the good news of Salvation to the World.....

This was the stewardship that was given to Paul..... making the word of God fully known.....was to show that Christ came to save the nations..... not just Jews.....And all people groups could experience the riches and glory and eternal hope of Christ living in and through them.....

And when Paul and his companions went out on their first missionary journey in Acts 13, they went immediately to Gentile territory.....and with each missionary journey the arms of the gospel extended further and further into the world..... until it finally reached nearly all of the known world..... preaching and teaching that the Gentiles had access to the Father through Christ..... Gentiles and Jews worshipping in same church together.....

As you watch the current news, every time you see the protesting, the conflicts, the racial divide, and you hear all the news casters and the politicians and Pundits giving their opinion on what should happen, in regards to racial justice and fairness in our culture,

Please, understand.... They are talking..... but they have no answers..... you need to cry out to the T.V. that Christ and Christ alone has broken down the dividing wall of hostility..... Christ and Christ alone can bring both groups into one.....Christ and Christ alone can first reconcile man to god so man can be reconciled to each other.....it is not wrong to try to create laws to benefit the oppressed..... but at the end of the day, What is our only hope in life and death?

That we are not our own, but belong body and soul both in life and death to God and our faithful saviour Jesus Christ....**this is** what Paul means by Christ in you the hope of glory..... He is our only hope....of salvation... .of life..... of eternal life....

Christ died for the nations.....and it was the apostle Paul who had the privilege of the stewardship of delivering the message. and he did it faithfully through making the Word of God fully known.....

2ndly, notice, that he makes the word of God fully known with what I want to call a trifacta for pastoral ministry..... so points 2, 3, and 4 will more or less be examined together.....within the context of making the word of God fully known Paul writes in verse 28,

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

This trifacta for pastoral ministry, of making the word of God fully known starts with Christ, doesn't it?

This is not a surprise to us because we know that when someone is making the word of God fully known Jesus will be at the forefront because as I have said over and over and over that the

Bible is a book about Christ.... When you open it and teach it, all roads lead to Christ.....all roads lead to the story of God reconciling man to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

"Him we proclaim....." Paul has been proclaiming Christ throughout the book of Colossians.....telling us who Christ is, what He has done, and why that matters.....He is proclaiming Christ to Christian believers..... listen..... His proclamation is related to Christ being preeminent and Christ being sufficient for believers.....Christ for salvation and Christ for Sanctification.....He has told us that Christ is God and is the creator and sustainer of every one and everything.....

When you first became a Christian, you understood that Christ died for your sins and save you..... and as you grow, you grow in Christ, knowing Him better, loving Him more....You begin to understand His deity..... how he walked on the earth and how this applies to you..... what a joy it is to read about Christ in the gospel accounts.....

see his compassion, his love, his concern for the hurting, his frustration with his disciples, his righteous indignation toward the Pharisees, his miraculous power, raising the dead.....calming the seas, healing lepers..... and you understand his humanity, how he was hungry, tired, thirsty..... And when we teach these things, this is all part of proclaiming Him.....and Paul toiled and struggled and agonized over being sure that those in His care knew Christ.....

Do you know Him? And are you getting to know Him more? On wednsdays we have been working our way through the names of Christ..... we just finished looking at His 3 fold office.... (prophet, priest, and king) Last week we looked at Jesus "the son of man." We were surprised to find that this was a reference to his deity, not his humanity...and it was a title that was given to a person Daniel saw in a vision in Daniel 7.... that Jesus applied to Himself.....we would love for you to join us.....

We proclaim Him because we want you to know Him and love Him.....and mature in Him

But, he also wanted them to be living like Christ..... I pick this up from 2nd part of this trifecta with the phrase, "warning everyone...." This means, " to advise someone concerning the dangerous consequences of some happening or action—'to warn, warning... or admonish'¹¹ What Paul is saying here is that behaviour matters..... how you act matters.....When we proclaim the name of Christ, we are expected to demonstrate the fruit of Christ.....

I am called to warn you..... when we preach we are to rebuke, correct, and warn..... and we are going to see some of the warnings that Paul lays out to the people in the Colossian church in the weeks ahead.... In chapter 2 verse 4, he warns them not to be deluded by plausible arguments..... in verse 8 he warns them not to be captive by philosophy, empty deceit, or human tradition....

11 Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 436). New York: United Bible Societies.

Look over at chapter 3 verse 5,

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ¹²”

he is talking to believers..... he is warning Christians of the dangers of sexual sin, greed, and idolatry..... and as these warnings come from the pulpit, they are designed for you to repent, confess, and walk in manner that is pleasing to the Lord..... this is part of the maturing process.....

sometimes warnings come in private conversation..... these kinds of things are not easy..... but are part of pastoral ministry.... Part of presenting everyone mature in Christ...

we all need this..... we are all prone to drift.... We are all prone to wander....and it is the warnings from Scripture that are designed to bring us back, re-calibrate us, move us toward Christ...and to keep us in Christ.... To help us faithfully make it to the end

And, then, finally the 3rd part of the trifecta is "Teaching everyone." We just noticed that behavior matters.....well, so does belief..... in fact belief and behavior go hand in hand..... or you can call it faith and practice.....we all need instruction to help us in our belief....., and we already heard that our instruction is to come as the Word of God is made fully known.....

And, as we make the word of God full known, there are at least 4 categories or areas we need instruction in...

First, we need to understand our bible.... Line by line, verse by verse. We need a biblical theology...

2nd, we need to understand God, who He is, how He functions... we need a systematic theology.

3rd. We need to be taught how to live in our marriages, raising our kids, with our co-workers, with our neighbors – we need a practical theology

4th. We need to know how to share and defend our faith – we need to understand evangelism and apologetics.

Teaching all of these things is simply part of presenting you mature in in Christ..... Maturity is a process..... it takes time, effort on my part.... It takes time and involvement on your part.....we are in it together....

By God’s grace, I am asking Him to give me at least 15 more years of fruitful ministry.....I hope you will be here for every one of them.....and in those 15 years, we will never cover all I would like to cover.....This is an eternal book about an infinite God.....and we have the opportunity to learn more and more about Him....

12 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 3:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The verse by verse expository preaching is the foundation..... we added the catechism to help with our understanding of God..... The practical aspects of living the Christian life are woven into the sermon..... and learning to share and defend our faith is something that is lacking.....

But, do you see why Paul states, ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling....."

he understood the role of the shepherd caring for God's sheep..... and he labored and toiled and struggled and agonized over those in His care, even these Colossians who he had never met..... he worried over them.... and well he should..... False teachers have come in, Paul is miles away, in Roman prison.....And these believers in Colossae are his constant concern.....

So, he proclaimed Christ..... He warns everyone..... And he teaches everyone.....and though it is not mentioned here, it is a given because of other parts of the epistles..... he prays for everyone..... struggling, toiling, trusting, pleading with god to help him to present everyone mature in Christ....

And, quite honestly, .This is a calling that every pastor and every elder has in every church....Brad and I have been placed in the position of overseer, at Grace Fellowship Church, and God expects us to do our part to present you mature in Christ.....

I keep coming back to this, and I need to keep saying it....

this is why it is a big blow when you are not here.... Obviously, I am not speaking to everyone..... many of you are faithful to come... some of those who need to hear this are not hear to hear it...

You will not fully mature in Christ, if you do not come to church.....In fact, anyone who is not faithfully part of a local church will never fully mature in Christ.....The church is God's program, God's method, God's plan for growth and maturity....

Think of your mom or grandma who thinks you are coming to Sunday dinner, and she starts cooking way last Monday.... Spends half of her social security check on getting all the food together, paces herself and cooks on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday..... and starts cleaning the house on Thursday and getting all the final preparation ready on Friday and Saturday, plates the food on Sunday.... And you don't show up....

She toiled, labored, and prepared.... And where were you.... I as your pastor try to work hard to prepare a spiritual meal for you..... And I am called to present you mature in Christ..... and I feel this way when you are not here.... If you are not here, Brad and I cannot present you mature in Christ...

Now, I don't want to give you the impression that just showing up means you are maturing.....Showing up is starting point..... but, when you come, you have to be engaged in the service..... you have to come teachable. You have to come expecting.... you have to come wanting.... More of Christ.... Less of the sin in your life, and a desire to learn all you can about God through His Word.....

With God's help, we will commit to the toil and struggle to make the Word of God fully known.....

Will you with God's help commit to be a faithful part of the process.....

as we wait on the Lord Jesus to build His church.....

we will continue to say thank you!