

**PAUL'S MINISTRY**

Colossians 1:24-29

**Intro:** In the latter part of Colossians 1 the Apostle Paul spoke of his ministry. Twice he indicated that that was what he was doing. You find these statements at the end of verse 23 where he said, “whereof I Paul am made a minister.” And you will see it again at the beginning of verse 25 where he wrote, “Whereof I Paul am made a minister.” The verb, “am made,” is the same Greek word in both instances. It is expressed in the middle voice. Normally the middle voice is used when speaking of how the subject of the sentence acts upon himself. Thus, it would seem to say that the Apostle Paul made himself a minister. But we know from others passages that it was the Lord Who put Saul of Tarsus (as he was originally known) into the ministry. We can see this in what the Lord said to Ananias in Damascus about Saul when Ananias seemed very hesitant about approaching this well-known enemy of the Gospel and of the people of God. Here is what the Lord said:

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:15-16).

And when the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, this what he said about his ministry:

11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:11-12).

So why would Paul express himself in the middle voice which would make it sound like he put himself into the ministry which he had? I think it was because *he was expressing his wholehearted acceptance of the work that the Lord had appointed him to do.* This is real evidence of the grace of God in his life. Before he was saved, he hated Jesus Christ. He hated Christians. In fact, he seems to have hated all Gentiles. But the Lord saved him, and changed him, and “ordained” him to do the work which he had previously wanted to destroy. Paul was not a reluctant servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He loved the Lord, and he loved the people of God, and it was his greatest joy to spent his life serving the Lord and serving the people of the Lord. This was the great change that the Lord had made in his heart.

So this was the will of God for Paul, and Paul gladly accepted the call because there was nothing else that he would rather have done. He was not a reluctant minister, but an eager minister, eager to preach the Gospel, and eager to see his fellow believers growing in the Lord under the ministry of the Word.

But what is a “minister”? This is the translation of the Greek word δῆκονος, the same word from which we get our word *deacon*. However, the word basically means *one who renders service to another*. Paul was not saying that he was a deacon in the leadership of a church, but that he was a steward (1 Cor. 4:1) of the mysteries of God, an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20).

So here in the last six verses of Colossians 1 the Apostle Paul was describing his ministry. But it would be just as appropriate to say that he was describing *the* ministry. I don't see anything in the Bible to indicate that we are to change with the times. Evidently there are a lot of preachers today who think they are in competition with TV, or Hollywood, and so they feel that they have to put on a show. Years ago there was a youth organization that had as their slogan, “Anchored to the Rock, geared to the times.” You can't be both. And recent history of the church proves that. So it is very important, extremely important, for us to notice what the Apostle Paul said about his ministry so that we will know what we should be doing, and what we can expect, if we are to be faithful to the ministry to which the Lord has called us. The Colossian church was being attacked by those who had other ideas as to what the ministry should be. Paul wanted the believers in Colosse to know what the church should be doing, and we have it here in these verses before us today.

The first thing that we have in verse 24 is:

### **I. A SEEMING PARADOX (Col. 1:24).**

A paradox has to do with two things which can't both be true. That is what it appears that we have here, but they are not contradictory at all. What am I talking about? I am talking about Paul's word here where he said that he was *rejoicing in his sufferings*. Usually if you are rejoicing, you are not suffering, or if you are suffering you are not rejoicing. But Paul said he was doing both. What did he mean?

He was rejoicing because what he was going through was, as he told

them, “for you.” And it also showed his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. But why was he suffering? He was a prisoner of Rome, and he was confined because he was preaching the Gospel. He was receiving the same kind of treatment that the Roman world had given to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, although Paul was not even saved when the Lord died, yet he knew what the Lord had told His apostles about the kind of treatment they would receive from the world. I am referring to our Lord’s words which are recorded for us in John 15:18-19:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

Paul did not intentionally try to offend people in the world. He didn’t purposely try to offend those Jewish leaders he had worked with before he was saved. But the Gospel is offensive. It’s good news, but only good news for people who know they are sinners. But unless the Spirit of God is working in the hearts of people, they are not going to like it at all for us to tell them that they are sinners.

Paul didn’t try to offend people. He didn’t want to be arrested. But he could not avoid either one of those things. And it gave him joy to know that he was walking in the steps of his Lord.

We do not “fill up” anything that was lacking in the sacrifice of Christ. He did a perfect work. No one can possibly add to it. His one offering was sufficient for the complete salvation of everyone who will ever be saved. Besides several expositors have pointed out that the word “afflictions” is never used in Scripture as pointing to the sufferings of our Savior on the Cross. In addition, Paul said here that it was suffering for those who are already saved, “for His body’s sake,” being His church. So Paul could rejoice over his own sufferings because he was contributing to the edification of believers. Even now the Lord suffers when His people suffer.

The day is coming when “the afflictions of Christ” in the lives of His people will come to an end. But until then believers will suffer affliction because of their relationship to Christ.

## **II. THE MESSAGE OF THE MINISTRY (Col. 1:25-27).**

None of us holds the place that the Apostle Paul had with reference to the Word of God. But the “dispensation,” or stewardship, which was given to Paul was, as he said, “for you.” That is, it was for the advantage of the people of God, not only in Colosse, but everywhere the Word of God is proclaimed. And it was given to the Apostle Paul “to fulfil,” or better, *to complete* “the Word of God.” This does not mean that this letter to the Colossians was the last book of the Bible to be written, but it does mean that the revelation of God to us was completed by “the mystery” which is mentioned at the beginning of verse 26.

This word *mystery* appears some twenty-seven times in the NT, and it is an extremely important word. And it has a special meaning in the NT. It speaks of something not revealed previously, but which now has been “made manifest to His saints.” God’s Word has been revealed in a progressive manner. He didn’t give it all at once to one person, but He gave it over approximately 1600 years through many writers, some 40 in all.

So these truths were not locked into the OT Scriptures just waiting for someone to come who could unlock them and let us know what they were. No, they were not revealed until the time of the Apostle Paul, and mainly through him, but not exclusively through him. But with the revealing of these truths, the Word of God has been completed. And they have to do mainly with “the saints,” *i.e., the people of God*. The time came when God had determined to make the secret known. It was not an afterthought with God, but He had planned it before the world was. And Paul spoke of “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” or secret. “The glory of this mystery,” and then “the riches of the glory of this mystery.” This is where we need to remember 1 Cor. 2:9, “But it is written, Eye hath not seen . . .” And this blessing was not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles.

What was it? “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Remember what Paul had written in verse 23 about “the hope of the Gospel.” And then on back to verse 5 “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” Really that hope is expressed in verse 22 where we have the prospect of being present to God “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight.”

But how could this ever be, especially since it is not a hope just for a limited number of the Lord’s people, but for all of us, redeemed Jews and

redeemed Gentiles alike? We in Christ is salvation; Christ in us is our hope of glory, *i.e.*, of our glorification into his likeness.

Think about this! The One Who is preeminent in our salvation. This One Who is preeminent as the revelation of God. This One Who is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. This One who is the Head of the Church. This One has come to dwell in us, and He will never go away. We need to meditate on this until this glorious truth fills our hearts with great rejoicing.

And now we come to:

### **III. THE MINISTRY ITSELF (Col. 1:28-29).**

Here Paul told the Colossians church what he did, what his object was, and nature of his ministry.

#### **A. What he did.**

“Whom we preach.” The nature of the ministry in Paul’s day, and in our day, is primarily preaching Christ. If we are not preaching Christ, we are not preaching. He must be the theme of every message. How Paul delighted in this ministry! People need to hear of Him, and learn of Him, and to trust in Him – Who He is, what He has done, where He is, and that He is coming again! This is what Philip did when he went down to Samaria. Acts 8:5 tell us, “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” And in Acts 9:20 we are told that this is how the Apostle Paul began his ministry: “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” And that always was what Paul did. So he was telling the truth when he said of Christ, “Whom we preach.”

But he also did some warning. That is why he wrote this epistle, not only to edify them and to encourage them in their walk with the Lord, but to warn them about teachers who did not preach Christ. Cf. 2:8, 18-19. In fact, most of the second chapter is a warning. Beware of anyone who does not proclaim Christ.

But there was always more teaching to be done. And such teaching must be based upon the Word of God. “All wisdom” is all kinds of wisdom, but all within the limits of the Word of God. This is the wisdom of God.

And Paul's objective was to present every man "perfect in Christ Jesus." Note how Paul spoke of "every man" three times. He, of course, was speaking of every saved man, woman, young person, and even children. Paul was not interested in entertaining them. He was interested in their salvation, and, after that, their edification in a life that is pleasing to God.

Finally we come to nature of his ministry, that is, how he performed it. Paul understood that Christ is in us working in us and through us, and with him our Lord was working mightily. This meant that Paul realized how dependent he was upon the Lord Jesus Christ for an effective ministry. Cf. Phil. 2:13.

**Concl:** Now as we come to the end of this chapter the big question we need to ask ourselves is, "Is this characteristic of my ministry? If I am seeking to serve the Lord at all, and to live for Him, is this the way I am going about it? The church at Colosse had made a good start, but their ministry was being threatened by false teachers who did not believe that Christ was sufficient for the salvation of sinners, nor that He was sufficient for the life we are to live, or for the work that we have been called to do.

It is easy for us to drift away from the things the Apostle Paul told the Colossian believers in this letter. But let us remember that it was for us, too, upon whom the end of the ages has come. God in His Word, according to the Apostle Peter, has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. So, although we may be considered to be out of touch with our generation, let's make sure that we are not out of touch with God. By doing His work according to His Word and in depending upon Him alone, we can see the blessing of God as we seek to edify His people, and as we seek to bring the lost to Christ.