

Message #7

Colossians 1:23b-29

I will never forget the time we were in Dallas at Believer's Chapel and an usher handed me a manuscript. I asked him what is this? He said this is a copy of the exposition you are about to hear. So they handed us a printed out exposition of the text in Genesis that would be expounded by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. Dr. Johnson walked to the pulpit and began his exposition and it was riveting. The Spirit of God lit up in my soul and his exposition, which was just about 50 minutes, seemed like 5 minutes. I had never seen or heard anything like that before in church. But I made a determination from that point on that if I were ever in a position to expound the Scriptures that is the way I would do it.

Now to understand this text in Colossians we need to understand what these people were reading in this letter and hearing.

The Apostle Paul began this letter by developing the doctrine of Christology. Jesus Christ is fully God. He is the creator of all things; He is the sustainer of all things; He is the head of the Church. Then, in the same context, he developed the doctrine of Soteriology. Jesus Christ is the one who paid the redemption price and can forgive all sins. Through Jesus Christ we may be reconciled to God. Through Jesus Christ we sinners may have peace with God. These Colossians had never heard anything like this.

They were living in a religious world that taught works salvation; law salvation, merit salvation and bizarre views about Jesus Christ. The Gnostics taught He was some spirit emanation. The Jews taught He was a prophet and teacher of religion. Those Colossians had never heard anything like what Paul was teaching.

So Paul decided to develop another doctrine, the doctrine of Ecclesiology, the Church. The Colossians needed to understand what his ministry to the church was all about. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church but Paul was the Apostle singled out by God to reveal new dispensational truth to the Church.

So what Paul does here is to defend his ministry. These Colossians needed to realize just who Paul was and just exactly what he was doing.

PAUL WAS MADE A MINISTER BY A STEWARDSHIP GIVEN TO HIM BY GOD, AND HE JOYOUSLY SERVED GOD BY HIS PREACHING AND TEACHING MINISTRY NO MATTER WHAT HE FACED.

This is a very personal look at the kind of ministry Paul had. He develops the reasons why he so relished his ministry and why he was so committed to preaching and teaching. Paul believed the thing that could produce sound minds in people was the preaching and teaching of the word of God. When people take God's word seriously, it develops a sound doctrine, sound mind and sound lives.

I do think there is a place for counselors such as psychologists and psychiatrists. However, I have never known of someone who was serious about God's written Scriptures who ever needed it.

FACT #1 – Paul was made a minister. **1:23b**

Paul said the first thing you need to know about me is that I was made a minister. The word minister (diakonos) is one that means Paul was made an attendant minister and officer in God's ministry (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 108).

Paul said I was not looking for this job. I was not politicking for this job. I was made a minister by Jesus Christ. The aorist tense of the verb points back to a point of time when Jesus Christ stopped him on the road to Damascus.

FACT #2 – Paul rejoices in his sufferings. **1:24a**

Now Paul rejoices in his sufferings because those sufferings were in behalf of God's truth and people. The word "suffering" (paqhma) refers to concrete and specific negative things that hit a person, which plays on emotions (*Ibid.*, pp. 332-333).

When negative things hit Paul, he realized those negative things were due to the fact that he was ministering the truth of the grace of God and he rejoiced in that. He did not get along with the religious world. The religious world hated Paul and Paul rejoiced at that.

He is suffering for taking the truth to the people of God.

FACT #3 – Paul fills up what is lacking and deficient in Christ's affliction. **1:24b**

It is important to understand what Paul is saying here. When Jesus Christ was on the cross, He cried it is finished. That means all salvific things are accomplished. There is nothing more that is needed to save a sinner.

The word for "afflictions" (qliyic) is never used of Christ's redemptive or atoning work on the cross. This word speaks of different troubles, trials, afflictions and pressures that a believer may experience in this world.

He is not talking about atoning or redemptive afflictions. What Paul is teaching is that he experienced negative things in life because of his identification with Jesus Christ.

Paul says I go through difficulties in my body because I am ministering to His body, the Church. I am bringing full grace truth that you need to know to the Church and that is why I suffer.

Now the emphasis on his suffering is that He fills up what is lacking in the troubles and tribulations and trials of Christ.

In other words, the reason why Paul was suffering, and at times the reason why we suffer, is because we are linked to Jesus Christ and His family. This is why we are not right now experiencing Millennial bliss in this world.

FACT #4 – Paul was made a minister of the church. **1:25**

Two times in this context, Paul says he was “made” a minister (**1:23b; 1:25a**). That word “made” actually carries with it the idea of bringing something into existence or into being (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 92).

The verb “made” is aorist tense and middle voice. What that means is that God made the determination at one point of time to put Paul in ministry and now Paul was experiencing some of the results of God putting him into ministry.

Paul is driving home the truth that God made him a minister. God was the One who brought Paul’s salvation and ministry into existence. Paul did not become a minister because he wanted to be a minister or thought it would be a good career move for him. He became a minister, as Dr. Richard Melick said, because God “divinely appointed” him to be in ministry (*Colossians*, p. 241).

When one studies the life of Paul, it becomes very evident that the last thing he ever wanted to be was a minister that unlocked truth about Jesus Christ. He was a zealous Judaizer who hated Jesus Christ and wanted to imprison and kill all Christians (Acts 9:1-2; 22:4; 26:9-11). God sovereignly saved Paul and God sovereignly made him a minister and put him into ministry and Paul knew that.

There are three critical realities that Paul brings out here:

Reality #1 - Paul was made a minister in a dispensational stewardship given him by God. **1:25a**

The word “stewardship” is the word dispensation (oikonomian). Do not miss this. Dispensationalism did not start with J. N. Darby or C. I. Scofield. It started with the Apostle Paul. The word is a word that means “house law.” In a house you have different rooms and in those rooms you use them at different times and you have different rules or laws to function in each room. That is dispensationalism. In God’s Kingdom House there are different rooms and the action happens at different times and there are governing rules for the action when in that room. We are in the age of grace, the Church Age.

Reality #2 - Paul was made a minister in a dispensational/stewardship for the churches benefit. **1:25b**

Paul’s ministry is for the churches benefit. He is the Apostle that God called to minister grace teaching and grace truth. God called Paul and gifted Paul for the churches benefit. Don’t miss this. Paul’s primary focus is not entertaining lost people, but teaching saved people.

Reality #3 - Paul was made a minister in a dispensational stewardship to fully preach the word of God. **1:25c**

Do you see what the focus is here on a true ministry that is like Paul's ministry to the church? It is to fully preach God's word to the church.

FACT #5 – Paul is preaching God's word which reveals a Divine mystery. **1:26-28**

A mystery in the Bible is not something unknown by God; it is something unknown by God's people until God chooses to reveal it.

There are six realities about this mystery:

Reality #1 - The mystery Paul revealed had been hidden from past ages and generations. **1:26a**

The grace gospel was not known in previous times and dispensations. The truth about Gentiles being brought into a relationship with God that formed the body of Jesus Christ was not known until God raised up Paul to reveal it.

Church truth and Grace truth is Pauline truth. This is why some are so lacking in their study of Biblical prophecy. They are all confused about the Rapture of the Church and the Second coming of Jesus Christ because they are taking passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke and trying to form a doctrine that is not aimed at forming Church doctrine. Paul is the Apostle who unlocks truth pertaining to the body of Jesus Christ.

Reality #2 - The mystery Paul revealed has now been manifest to His saints. **1:26b**

According to the Barna poll, 85% of ministers believe the primary goal of the church is to reach the lost. Apparently they haven't spent much time studying Paul.

God's truth is for God's people. The saints to whom Paul is referring are those who are part of the Church Age. We are the privileged people to be able to understand the word of God at a level that is beyond that of other ages.

The dispensational truth that we are able to grasp is amazing. It is the responsibility of the minister of the church to teach and preach God's word to God's people.

Reality #3 - The mystery Paul revealed was sovereignly willed to be revealed by God. **1:27a**

The riches of the grace of God and the dispensational truth have been revealed by God to the church through Paul. Paul was not the one inventing this doctrine. This truth about Gentiles being in the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ is truth God, Himself, willed to be revealed. Most people have no idea how blessed we are to have this truth.

Reality #4 - The mystery Paul revealed by God is Jesus Christ is in every Gentile believer. **1:27b**

Every person who has invited Jesus Christ into his or her life has Jesus Christ living in him.

Reality #5 - The mystery Paul revealed is that Jesus Christ is the hope of glory. **1:27c**

The hope we have of eternal glory is found in Jesus Christ. He is our hope and without Him, we have no hope.

Reality #6 - The mystery Paul reveals continually proclaims truth about Jesus Christ. **1:28**

Paul's ministry was about continual preaching, proclaiming, teaching and admonishing the word of God and the truth of God to the people of God. Paul's ministry was one devoted to continual preaching and teaching concerning Jesus Christ. As Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said, "He preached a Person, not simply a system."

The word "admonish" is the word that means to put in someone's mind (*Ibid.*, p. 305). He is very careful to point out that the way He handled God's truth in his preaching and teaching is with "all wisdom." So Paul is not sloppy in the way he handles God's word. He handles it with all wisdom. Paul is not just sharing stories, but he very carefully and very accurately teaches truth about Jesus Christ to all men. Notice carefully that three times in **verse 28** Paul says he preached to "every man."

This is what every person needs at church. They need to hear wise teaching and preaching that points them to Jesus Christ.

FACT #6 – Paul gives the reason for his teaching and preaching about Jesus Christ. **1:28c-29**

There are two reasons or purposes that he gives for his ministry:

Reason #1 - Because this teaching will present every believer complete in Christ. **1:28c**

Every minister should take a serious look at what is said here. Your job is to very carefully preach and teach the whole word of God to the people so that they may be complete in Jesus Christ. You leave things out or choose bits and pieces of things and believers will not be complete. Believers need to be taught books of the Bible and doctrine.

Reason #2 - Because teaching that makes people complete in Christ is the reason God's power mightily works within Paul. **1:29**

Paul says this is why God's power works in me as an apostle and this is why I labor to communicate truth.

Now and then you will hear someone say I really like the Psalms. Well, how about Galatians and Romans and Ephesians and Colossians? That is where you find grace truth about Jesus Christ.

When it comes to prophecy, how about I & II Thessalonians? That is where you find Rapture Truth pertaining to the Church. If you want to be complete, you need Jesus Christ in your life.