

Colossians 1:24-29 Ministry – Part 1

1

Introduction

The ministry is a topic that was dear to the heart of the apostle Paul. He never lost the sense of wonder that God would call him to the ministry. Paul often spoke of his ministry when he needed to establish his authority and credibility. That was his aim in this passage. Colossians was written to counter the teachings of the false teachers, and it was essential for Paul to defend his authority to speak for God. Otherwise, the false teachers would have dismissed what he wrote as merely his own opinion. Having begun the epistle with a statement of his apostolic authority (1:1), Paul now gives a detailed look at the divine character of his ministry. He recites eight aspects of that ministry: the source of the ministry, the spirit of the ministry, the suffering of the ministry, the scope of the ministry, the subject of the ministry, the style of the ministry, the sum of the ministry, and the strength of the ministry.

2

Colossians 1:24-29

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. ²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

3

The Source of Ministry

Colossians 1:25a

the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you

In verse 23, Paul described the Gospel of which he was made a minister. He repeats the thought saying again that he was made a minister of Christ's church. The source of his ministry was God.

Paul had not set out to be a minister of Jesus Christ, he persecuted the church. Yet on the road to Damascus, Jesus revealed Himself and called Paul to Himself.

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All Christians have been called to serve God in one capacity or another. God saved us to serve Him in this world. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts, which are to be used in the service to which we are called. Like Paul, the believer's responsibility is to be obedient to that calling.

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Because he was made a minister by sovereign call, Paul viewed his ministry as a **stewardship from God**. **Stewardship** translates a compound word made up of *oikos* ("house") and *nemō* ("manage"). It means to manage a household as a steward of someone else's possessions. The steward had oversight of the other servants and handled the business and financial affairs of the household. That freed the owner to travel and pursue other interests. Being a steward was thus a position of great trust and responsibility in the ancient world.

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The church is the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15), and all believers have the responsibility to manage the ministries the Lord has given them. Contrary to much popular teaching today, our spiritual gifts are not intended for our own edification. They are given to help us minister to others. Paul told the Colossians that his stewardship was given to him for them. This means it was bestowed on Paul for the church's benefit.

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Peter echoed the same truth when he wrote, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). Leaders have a special stewardship: "The overseer must be above reproach as God's steward" (Titus 1:7). Every Christian will one day give account to Christ of his stewardship. May none of us be found poor stewards, like the lazy servants in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:24–25).

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The Spirit of Ministry

Colossians 1:24a

I now rejoice

The call that Jesus has for our lives can be challenging and demanding but it was never intended to be an arduous and unbearable burden. Paul's attitude of joy should be the spirit of ministry for every Christian. Christian joy is internal. It is not dependent on circumstances but knowing that God is in control. Circumstances, people, and worry are the thieves that are eager to steal the joy of the ministry. Humility, devotion to Christ, and trust in God protect the joy that is Christ's legacy to every Christian.

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The Sufferings of Ministry

Colossians 1:24

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church

To emphasize that joy is independent of circumstances, Paul tells the Colossians that he rejoices in my sufferings for you. Sufferings refers to his present imprisonment (Acts 28:16, 30), from which he wrote Colossians. Paul could rejoice despite his imprisonment because he always viewed himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ, not the Roman Empire (cf. Philem. 1, 9, 23).

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Why was suffering a cause for joy? The New Testament suggests at least five reasons.

First, suffering brings believers closer to Christ. Paul wrote, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Suffering in the cause of Christ yields the fruit of better understanding of what Jesus went through in His suffering.

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Second, suffering assures the believer that he belongs to Christ. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Because “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master” (Matt. 10:24), we will suffer. Paul warned Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter tells suffering Christians, “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Pet. 4:14). Suffering causes believers to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, which gives assurance of salvation.

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Third, suffering brings a future reward. “If indeed we suffer with [Christ] in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:17–18). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Fourth, suffering can result in the salvation of others. Church history is filled with accounts of those who came to Christ after watching other Christians endure suffering.

Fifth, suffering frustrates Satan. He wants suffering to harm us, but God brings good out of it.

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The statement **fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church** is not saying that Christ’s death was insufficient for our salvation as some believe.

The New Testament is clear that Christ’s sufferings need nothing added to them. In Jesus’ death on the cross, the work of salvation was completed. Further, the Colossian heretics taught that human works were necessary for salvation. To teach that believers’ suffering was necessary to help pay for their sins would be to play right into the false teacher’s hands.

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In my flesh refers to Paul's physical pain. When he says **for the sake of His body, which is the church.** He is indicating that the physical pain he endures at the hands of Christ-hating persecutors is the result of what he does to benefit and build the church. It was not his personality that offended and brought hostile injury to him, but his ministry for the Body of Christ.

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In what sense were Paul's sufferings **filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions**? In that Paul was receiving the persecution that was intended for Christ. Jesus, having ascended to heaven, was out of their reach. But because His enemies had not filled up all the injuries they wanted to inflict on Him, they turned their hatred on those who preached the gospel. It was in that sense that Paul filled up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. Those who wish to represent Christ and serve His church must be willing to suffer for His Name.

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So What ...

We are all called to minister to others. It may be sharing the Gospel with a friend or teaching and building up other Christians. It can be an act of compassion to those who are hurting and struggling. God has given you gifts and talents so use them for His Kingdom.

Much of Christianity today focuses on self, yet true ministry focuses on others. We are Jesus' hands, feet, and voice in this world.

As we live in this fallen sinful world, our lives can become an offense to those who are trapped in Satan's lies. They respond to the light in anger and often lash out. Don't be discouraged. God is not finished yet and He has promised to be with us. Let's commit ourselves to be faithful!