

Week 3

THE AIM OF MINISTRY: MATURITY IN CHRIST

Colossians 1:24-2:5

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

(Colossians 1:28, ESV)
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Introduction

Have you ever tried to point something out to a small child? If you've ever played with a baby and attempted to point to a toy, you've noticed that they don't usually look at the toy. Instead, they look at your finger. You say to them, "No, not my finger! Look at that toy behind you!" You point again. They look again at your finger. It can be quite frustrating. You eventually have to pick them up and turn them around in the direction facing the toy.

Sadly, the same thing happens with many church ministries and leaders. The leader is saying, "Look at Jesus!" and a bunch of the people all leave thinking, "That preacher is a good speaker." When we do this, we're looking at the finger instead of the object.

We are easily drawn to lesser things, even when those lesser things are pointing us to something—or Someone—else.

Paul is deeply concerned that the Colossians see what is most important—Jesus Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation." Jesus is the hero of Paul's story and he will labor with all his might to help people grow in appreciation of Christ's majesty.

This passage is Paul's way of picking us up and turning us toward Jesus. Though he's already focused so much on who Jesus is and what he's done for us, he's not convinced we get it.

Investigation

Read Colossians 1:24-2:5

1. In verse 26, Paul mentions “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.” What is the mystery? (Note: *Ephesians 3:7-10* and *Romans 16:25-27* also mention this idea)
2. What words does Paul use to describe his ministry?
3. Paul indicates that the goal of his ministry is to “present everyone mature in Christ.” How does he describe maturity throughout the rest of the text?
4. Verse 29 says, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” How is it that God works his energy through our effort? How does that work?

Implication

1. Many Christians seem to gauge spiritual maturity based on the amount of biblical knowledge a person has. Is this a good indicator of spiritual maturity? Why or why not?
2. Paul says that his message for developing maturity in others is proclaiming Jesus himself ("Him we proclaim," verse 28). Why is it so important that we preach Jesus to one another constantly in our personal interactions with each other?
3. Paul seems to be in anguish about helping the Colossians grow closer to Jesus. How serious are you about helping yourself and others grow towards maturity in Christ?
4. What is one specific thing that you can do this week to help yourself and others "be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" (2:2-3)?

Other Issues

What does it mean that Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (1:24)?

The statement **in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (Which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions** has been the subject of much controversy. Roman Catholics have imagined here a reference to the suffering of Christians in purgatory. Christ’s suffering, they maintain, was not enough to purge us completely from our sins. Christians must make up what was lacking in Christ’s suffering on their behalf by their own suffering after death. That can hardly be Paul’s point, however. He has just finished demonstrating that Christ alone is sufficient to reconcile us to God (1:20–23). To do an about face now and teach that believers must help pay for their sins would undermine his whole argument. 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 expiate their sins would be to play right into the errorists’ hands. The idea that Paul refers to suffering in purgatory is ruled out by both the general content of the epistle and the immediate context, as well as the obvious absence of any mention of a place like purgatory in Scripture.

In my flesh refers to Paul’s physical pain. When he says **I do my share on behalf 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.

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. In 2 Corinthians 1:5 he wrote that “the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance.” He bore in his body the marks of the blows intended for Christ (Gal. 6:17; 2 Cor. 11:23–28). He not only suffered for Christ, but also for the sake of the church (2 Tim. 2:10). Those who wish to represent Christ and serve His church must be willing to suffer for His Name.⁷

⁷ John MacArthur, *Colossians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1992). 74.

Sermon Notes