

## **Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson**

**October 24, 2021**

### **Paul's Letter to the Church at Colossae**

#### **The Goal of Preaching and Teaching**

**Situational Context:** Paul has encouraged the church to walk, live, according to the calling to be disciples of Christ. Christ is sufficient to save. Therefore, he calls them to reject the spurious seeking for knowledge found in pagan systems of religion.

He prays that their knowledge of Christ and the gospel increase.

**Lesson Theme: Colossians 1:28-29 (ESV) <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**

Paul's goal is to protect these believers preventing them from false philosophy and error. Their protection is found in a mature understanding of Christ and the gospel. This goal of ministry and of the teacher/preacher is worthy of the greatest effort on the teacher/preacher. This effort is the manifestation of God's energy empowering him to the goal of mature Christians. This effort on the preacher/teacher is God's means of producing mature saints.

**1. A Steward of the Word: Colossians 1:24-27 (ESV) <sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> 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.**

**Interpretation:** As a servant of the gospel, Paul rejoices in his opportunity to participate in the sufferings of God's people. Just as Christ suffered as our head, we who are in Christ also suffer. The passage does not mean that the church is a continuing incarnation of Christ whose members by suffering add saving merit beyond what Christ achieved.

In contemporary pagan religion the "mysteries" were secret insights given (usually for a fee) to a select, initiated few. With some irony Paul uses the term for the revelation God has made available freely to the nations. In Paul's use, "mystery" refers to what once was hidden, but is now being revealed. God's saving purpose for Gentiles was largely hidden from them prior to the coming of Christ. Previous generations were allowed to "walk in their own ways". The Old Testament revealed in shadows, signs, and hints that God would personally take up residence in His people, and that He would create a new humanity uniting Gentiles and Jews through the Messiah.

### **Supporting Texts:**

**Mark 8:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

**Ephesians 1:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

**Ephesians 3:2-4 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

**Zechariah 9:9-10 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

## **Discussion Starters:**

How does the headship of Christ enter into our understanding of why Christians must suffer?

How does Paul's suffering encourage him?

Why is the ministry of the word a stewardship?

**2. The Goal: Colossians 1:28-29 (ESV) <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**

**Interpretation:** This language is employed by the mystery religions and the Gnostics to describe those who had become possessors of the secrets or knowledge boasted of by the particular religion (Gnosticism). But in Christ every believer is being made "mature", Christ like. Paul realizes that is an empowered means of God to the appointed goal.

## **Supporting Texts:**

**1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV) <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.**

**1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV) <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.**

## **Discussion Starters:**

**What makes a Christian mature?**

**What is the distinguishing mark of a mature Christian?**

**Paul describes his work as toil, why?**

**3. The Subject: Colossians 2:1-3 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may 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, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

**Interpretation:** Paul stressed knowledge in this letter because he was refuting a heresy that emphasized knowledge as the means of salvation. Paul insisted that the Christian, not the Gnostic, possessed genuine knowledge. This letter was also read to the Church at Laodicea. The only mystery that is important is knowledge of Christ.

**Supporting Texts:**

**Isaiah 11:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

**1 Corinthians 1:24 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

**Discussion Starters:**

**Why is it so tempting to add other knowledge to the gospel?**

**Why is Christ God's mystery?**

