

Him We Proclaim Col 1:24-2:5

This is really still introductory material in the letter, as Paul describes his ministry in general (1:24-29) and then describes how that ministry relates to the Colossians in particular (2:1-5). **We see both Paul's missional spirit and his pastoral heart.** [Pray]

Michal Horton, *Christless Christianity* "What Would Happen If Satan Took Over a City?" Over a half century ago, Donald Grey Barnhouse offered his own scenario, speculating that if Satan took over Philadelphia,

- All of the bars would be closed,
- Pornography banished, and
- Pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other.
- There would be no swearing.
- The children would say, "Yes, sir" and "No, ma'am,"
- And churches would be full every Sunday . . .

But Christ would not be preached.

Now you may not agree with his whole scenario (I don't!), but you get what he is driving at:

**Satan doesn't mind a moral improvement plan;
what he hates is Christ being preached.**

For Christ-less Christianity to be overcome, we need to millions of Christ-centered servants – commending Christ everywhere: in homes, neighborhoods, marketplaces, student ministries, pulpits...

Paul's primary subject in ministry is clear from **verse 1:28**: **Him we proclaim!**

- We proclaim a person!
- Not a formula, not a moral, religious system, but the Savior!

I love how **Philips** translates verse 28:

"So, naturally, we proclaim Christ."

Last week: the supremacy of a Christ assures us of the sufficiency of Christ.

Now: the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ necessitates the preaching of Christ.

Jesus was the all-consuming subject of Paul's ministry because he understood that Jesus is the grand subject of biblical revelation and all of human history.

So what can we learn from Paul's Christ-centered ministry?

We are not apostles like Paul, but anyone who seeks do Christian ministry can glean much from this passage.

1. **The Price of Christ-Centered Ministry (1:24)**
2. **The Priority of Christ-Centered Ministry (1:25-28a)**
3. **The Purpose of Christ-Centered Ministry (1:28b, 2:1-5)**
4. **The Power for Christ-Centered Ministry (1:29)**

#1: The Price [of Christ-centered Ministry]: Enduring the Afflictions of Christ (1:24)

There is a price to pay in proclaiming the gospel.

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 (1:24)

“In the flesh” — he’s talking about physical sufferings.

- attacks, dangers, imprisonments, etc.

He endures these sufferings to “fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”

- This does not mean there is something lacking in the atonement!
- Christ’s death is sufficient. The whole letter speaks to this.
- He is talking our Christian **sufferings** — also translated “**afflictions**” or “**tribulations**” that come to Christ’s people (Phil 1:29).

A. Christ’s sufferings were for propitiation; our afflictions are for propagation.

- Suffering will come to all who seek to live a godly life and advance the gospel.
- Sacrifice and mission are bound up together.
- We will not advance the mission without *afflictions*.

B. Our afflictions are part of God’s redemptive purposes.

- Notice it’s the afflictions “of Christ” or “the Messiah.”
- These are the sufferings of The Messiah and *his people have a part in these sufferings*.

Revelation 6

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. ¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

You catch that? Until “the number should be complete...”

- It’s like there is a certain tally of afflictions (or quota) that has to be met.
- Paul may have this in mind when he talks about “*filling up what is lacking.*”

You have it all through the history of the church — for 2,000 years – God’s people around the world enduring *the afflictions of the Messiah!* We could recite story after story!

So don’t be surprised by suffering; its a basic component of Christ discipleship and mission and it’s part of God’s redemptive plan.

The amazing part is the fact that Paul “**rejoices**” in these afflictions. How?

- Because he loves *Christ*.
- You are willing to suffer for the one you love.

- **Playoffs: a price for a ticket.... World Series, \$900! I don't love them that much.**
- Love spares no expense.
- Paul suffered because of his love for Christ, and...
- Because he loves *Christ's church*.
 - **How much is the church worth? Walking, driving, etc.**
 - Notice **Christ's body is the beneficiary of his sufferings.**
 - It is "for the sake of the body" (twice).

His sufferings were not meaningless... they were and are part of the mission, for the good of the church.

#2: The Priority: Expounding the Message of Christ (1:25-28)

"Him we proclaim"

- Here is our priority as preachers, teachers, & *disciple-makers* (which is every Christian).
- The job of word-driven disciple-makers (first and foremost) is not to comment on current affairs or to deal with every human problem, good and necessary as these activities may be, but rather, our priority is to announce that "Jesus is Lord" and apply this message to the hearts of people.
- We can look at how Paul breaks this down in four parts.
- **Catch the flow...**
 - The task: make God's word known (25)
 - This word is about a mystery, a story (26)
 - This mystery is about Christ (27)
 - To make the word known meant to make Christ known because he's the hero of Scripture.
 - So proclaim him! (28)

i. **A Stewardship Received (1:25)**

"of which" [the church] I became a minister [servant] according to the **stewardship** from God that was given to me for you, **to make the word of God fully known.**"

- Paul was given this ministry from God.
- He is a servant of the church.
- He serves the church by communicating Christ's word, not his opinions or pet topics: "to make the word of God fully known."

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

A steward is like a table waiter; you take what the chef prepares and serve it to the people. The teacher's job is not to be the cook, but the waiter.

- **Phil Jensen: Da Vinci's Mona Lisa is probably the world's most famous painting. It currently resides in a bullet proof, purpose-built case in the Louvre in France. It is considered so precious that it has only been exhibited outside the Louvre twice since**

the last century. In 1963, it was displayed in the National Art Gallery in D.C. and then in the spring of 74 in Tokyo.

- Think about those who were responsible for delivering this painting to these places. What if they decided, “**She is kind of ugly. Let’s give her a make-over? Maybe some highlights; a weave; a bit of lipstick; maybe some sun glasses. Beyoncé?.**”
- Their job was not to improve the painting. It was to deliver it in its original condition.

Likewise, our job is not to edit God’s Word, but to expound God’s Word.

“we do not tamper with God’s word” (2 Cor 4:2)

- We are to **preserve** it, and then **showcase** it!
- Our job is to take what we’ve received and make it known; put it on display.

We should also remember that for Paul the Word was not simply something to expound, like you may expound the latest news headlines; it was **also a power to be unleashed**. (see 1:6; Rom 1:16). Here is our task: to expound and unleash God’s Word, the gospel.

ii. A Mystery Revealed (1:26-27)

Vs. 26: “a mystery hidden for ages”

- All around Asia Minor and the ancient world at this time were mystery cults.
- Many thought Christianity was that.
- After all, it had a mystery.
- But this was not a mystery of the cults and false teachers.
- It’s a story that climaxes on Christ.

The mystery? This is not like a Sherlock Holmes Mystery!

This is God’s **unfolding plan for the world; his plan of redemption through the Messiah** (cf. 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3–4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).

- **This mystery was hidden by God until it could be revealed in the incarnation of the Son of God – death, burial resurrection.**
- Although elements of God’s design were already known through the prophets, key aspects were hidden until God revealed them in Christ.
- You may think of this “mystery” as “redemptive history” or “the story of the Bible.”

This is one text among many that demonstrates how the Bible is telling one big story, of which Christ is the hero.

- **The Bible is not an inspiring book of virtues. Andy Griffith and other stories can give you moral lessons. The Bible is more than that.**
- **The Bible is a “Him book.”**
- **It is possible to know Bible stories but miss the Story of the Bible.**
- **Many as a result do bad things with the Bible.**
 - **Solomon built an opulent temple, so should we.**
 - **Ruth - be nice to your mother in law**

Jesus showed us that it is all pointing to him (Luke 24; John 5).

V. 27: This mystery/message/story is about Christ, “Christ in you” (27)

a. The Inclusion: The Gentiles are included! That's us!

- In *you* [plural] (27, cf., Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6).
- Gods' saving purposes extends to the Gentiles.
- What a privilege - to be able to piggy-back on Israel's privileges, and be one with them.

b. The Intimacy: "Christ is *in you*" what a phrase!

- Not in a **tabernacle**, **tent**, but in **you**.
- What a thought! Christ in you!

Remember the book of Exodus.

- Chapters 1-18: *The God Who **Delivers***;
- Chapters 19-24, The God Who **Demands** (Sinai)
- But the climax of the book is chapters 25-40, The God Who **Dwells**.
- You see it in all the **Ram skins, yarns, linens, priests garments, furniture, and all that detail**
- **25:8** – "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." "I shall dwell in their midst."
- **40:34-38** - last paragraph, God's tent, with a cloud about it, the glory of God filled the tabernacle.
- The climax was God's big tent! It's God wanting to dwell with his people!
- God "can't get close enough" to his people you might say.

I'm sure you know what it's like to *not wanting to be apart from someone?*

- **Dating story in 2003: Driving hours to meet each other after a full week, for just a few hours... You do crazy things when in love... I just wanted to be with her...**
- Being present is different than a letter; an email... Being with her was different.
- It was a **dominating desire**.
- **That's what you see with your God. He wants to be with you.**
- **Christ's insists on being as close to his people as he could possibly be!**
- Christ wants to be this near his people: "In you."

Revelation, the climax of the whole Bible — God dwelling with his people!

c. The Inspiration: "the hope of glory"

- The indwelling Christ guarantees us of the glory to come!
- We can expect to share in his glory because he is in us now!
- This inspires perseverance.

[A stewardship received, a mystery revealed, and now an approach to follow...

iii. *An Approach to Follow (1:28)*

Paul gives us a comprehensive vision of a word-driven ministry.

- It's a comprehensive **approach** (proclaim, warn, teach, apply wisdom).
- And a comprehensive audience: "**everyone**" (repeated).

i. “Proclaim” like an Evangelist

- ***katangellomen*** “to announce throughout.”
- It means to proclaim far and wide.” Proclaim the news: the victory is won!
- We are not giving advice; we are declaring the news!

ii. Warn like a Prophet

- To “admonish” is the idea of warning people who are tempted to drift away – to false teaching, or ungodly living.
- Teachers can’t be afraid to warn.
- A faithful teacher is **like a forest ranger**, aware of the landscape, alerting people to *dangerous wildlife in the area*.
- That was the case in Colossae, Paul was not unaware of false teaching; he was very much aware.
- *To the Ephesians: “Therefore **be alert**, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to **admonish everyone with tears**. (Acts 20:31)*

We see in Scripture that Paul..

- Warned about false doctrine: chapter 2:6-23.
- Warned about the dangers of sin
- Warned about God’s judgement

iii. Teach like a Theologian

Teaching is so important in the Christian faith:

1. We are called to make disciples of all nations, by *teaching*.
2. Teaching is foundational for everything we do as the church....
 - The word tells us how to do all the other things we do...
3. God has revealed himself in Scripture, and this must be taught.
4. Theology leads to biography.

iv. Impart Wisdom like a Sage

“in all wisdom”

This gets at the question: *How does the Gospel relate to all of life?*

- Help them put on Christ. “Christ is you’re life” (3:4)
- **Race** is a gospel issue- 3:11
- **Forgiveness** is a gospel issue - 3:13
- **Anxiety** - 3:15, peace of Christ rules where the word of Christ dwells
- **Everything** - 3:17
- Every ethical demand is rooted in the gospel, and shaped by the gospel.

One more thing. Put this in a mission setting:

Christ-Centered exposition may bring persecution!

Mt 23:34 *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes (teachers), some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.*

Christ-centered preaching and teaching is offensive because the cross is offensive.

- Thus it is dangerous.
- The apostles were *not* persecuted for telling *people OT trivia, or giving people a list of moral lessons to follow; they were persecuted because they would not stop preaching and teaching that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 5:42).*

A Comprehensive Audience (1:28)

“warning *everyone*” “teaching *everyone*” present “*everyone*”

- Who needs Christ-centered exposition? **Everyone!**
- Paul’s emphasis on everyone may be a subtle statement about the Colossian heresy; some believe there was kind of an elitism that was promoted.
- Those “in the know,” the “insiders” had an upper hand on spiritual things.
- But Paul says Christ and growth in Christ is available to “everyone.”
- *It is for Joe Schmo and his wife Janet Schmo!*
- It’s not a click! It’s not for the elite! It’s not for clergy only; or aspiring ministers only!

We have a global Gospel. We have a global audience.

- What do people need in New York? They need an open Bible, someone to teach it and exalt Jesus.
- What do people need in Nigeria? The same thing! (Example: Leper Colony)

The nations need Christ centered preaching and teaching.

#3: The Purpose: Presenting Believers Mature in Christ (1:28b; 2:1-5)

Notice the purpose clause, “mature” or “complete” or “perfect” in Christ.

Maturity in Christ is Paul’s ambition for every Christian.

Notice two things: (1) sanctifying purpose, (2) eternal purpose.

A. Christ-centered exposition has a sanctifying purpose, not just an evangelistic purpose!

- We obviously preach Christ so that others will be converted.
- Paul thanked God for this earlier in the chapter (see 1:5-7)
- But we continue the Christian life, like we began it: 2:6, “just as you received him, walk in him.”
- How did you receive him? By faith! In trust! In joy! In hope! In adoration!
- You don’t outgrow Jesus.
- David Brainard described his ministry to Indians in Stockbridge this way: “I never got away from Jesus and him crucified, and I found that when my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ and him crucified, I had no need to give them instructions about morality.”

Now this raises some questions. By constantly pointing people to Jesus through instruction and proclamation and counseling, believer’s will grow into maturity?

Shouldn't we discuss deeper issues? Shouldn't we get practical? Shouldn't we address behavior?

Practical? Yes, should get but practical instruction is not separated from our union with Christ and the gospel. (Colossians 3:1ff)

Deeper? What is deeper than Jesus Christ! You never outgrow the gospel. (Colossians 2:6-7; Phil 3; Romans 16:25).

- "I want to know Christ" — **Maturity does not go beyond Jesus, but deeper into Jesus.**
- There are **so many dimensions of the gospel to ponder and apply!**
- **The Spirit keeps the focus on Jesus (Jn 14-16)**
- For all eternity we will be increasing in the knowledge of Christ!

Boring? Sometimes preachers/teachers can be boring! "Bueller"

- In terms of content, no! Christ-exalting teaching should not become boring!
- **Hearing my wife say she loves me never gets old! Especially if I haven't seen her in six days! (Col 2:9; 14-15)**
- **Consider the riches of Christ's glory (1:27a).**
- "unsearchable." (Eph. 3:7).
- **As long as you are preaching and teaching Christ, you will never run out of material!**

We need to remember what people actually longing for: glory.

"show me your glory." (twice "glory").

We need to also remember how people actually change.

- It's not through behavior modification [as helpful and as necessary as aspects of this may be], but through *affections*. (Col 2:23)
- **Your life is directed by your loves.**
- (1:27) Paul hits on what people need to be reminded of daily: "Christ in you."

How does this work? Think in co-centric circles.

Jesus changes us from the inside out.

- It starts here: **Christ in You**
- Then **from Affections/Thoughts to...**
 - To **Actions**
 - To **Relationships**
 - To **missional purpose in the world.**

Jesus changes us from the inside out.

2:1-5 — What does maturity look like?

The rest of the letter is going to reveal that. **2:6-4:6** is all about how they grow in maturity.

- In **2:1-5** it is this: **Maturity is about being Christ-centered, and church focused.**

2:1: Paul had never met them but he wants them to know he has been "struggling" on their behalf.

2:2-5: Here's what Paul longs for: Maturity is Christ centered and community focused. Notice the focus on Christ and their lives together in community.

... 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

There are three progressive ideas stated... encouraged, being knit together, and the ultimate goal: knowledge of the mystery of Christ.

These are set off by the purpose clause "in order that" in verse 2 ("that") ... you may be encouraged" (Greek)... which can be supplied for the next two... that you would be knit together, and have knowledge of Christ....

Paul wants them to know what he's about.... .. It's Christ and community.

Encouraged hearts - you see Paul's pastoral heart here. Then notice what he mentions...

Relational Harmony: "being knit together in love."

- You can only do this in community, you can't do it in isolation.
- The mature Christian loves his/her brothers and sisters.
- He or she is a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.
- An immature person is often self-centered and may be divisive.
- As Christ is our supreme affection, and as heaven is our supreme hope, we can be united in love.

This harmony leads to more **Christ-centered knowledge, satisfaction and assurance:** "to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"

- Notice that little word "to"
- There's a link with community and knowledge/satisfaction/assurance.
- As you are involved in the life of other believers, united in Christ, you will experience more and more spiritual riches, more insights, greater assurance, and a deeper knowledge of a Christ.
- Certain spiritual riches are reserved for those who encourage their brothers and sisters and have a deep relational commitment to those in the local church.
- If you stay on the relational periphery of the church, you will be lacking certain riches, blessings.
- So don't!
- involvement in the life of the community deepens gospel understanding, just as involvement in the mission deepens gospel understanding.

Paul's ultimate goal was for the believers to "know the mystery of God" namely "Christ" in the fellowship of the church..

In Christ are all the treasures of wisdom.

- The false teachers in Colossae focused on a particular kind of wisdom.
- Paul focused on Christ because Christ is the key to the storehouse of all God's resources.
- "Hidden away" - there's always more to discover in Christ. Always a new freshness, new amazement, new glory.

Theological stability (v. 4).

- The mature saint is not led astray by bootleg religion.
- We will consider this more hr next two weeks

Good order in Christ (v. 5).

- Paul is glad to see this kind of health in such a young church (2:5).
- "orderly and firm." These are military terms.
- He's saying "the camp is in order,"
- The Colossians began well. And they were doing well.
- The false teaching had not had good success to this point.

B. Christ-centered exposition has an eternal purpose, not just a temporal purpose.

"Present" is the idea of standing before God.

- The teaching ministry is about fitting people for eternity.
- Paul knew that the people in the church were unfinished business, and that he had work today to present them to Christ.
- I've said it before, "preaching is about getting people ready to die."
- It's really true about all word-driven ministry.
- How might we get them ready? We give them Christ from the Word.

#4: The Power: Relying on the Energy of Christ (1:29)

Notice work ethic, his source of power.

A. Notice Paul's work ethic.

The wider use of **κόπος** (toil) means "beating," ... a weariness that results from being repeatedly struck.

- Paul says "I feel as though I have taken a beating in ministry."
- "I worked hard than them all" (1 Cor. 15:10).

His work ethic is further described w imagery of an athletic contest: **ἀγωνίζομαι** "struggling"

- This is effort, discipline.... (Soto taking BP till after midnight)
- Did you see the Kenyan man run the marathon in under 2 hours! The fastest time in history, right?!
- The NT uses athletic imagery often: Heb 12:1-2; 1 Tim 4:7; 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tim 2:3ff
- Ministry is laborious, strenuous; tiresome. It requires work and discipline.
- Luther reportedly fell into the bed some night because he was so tired (and he didn't change his sheets for a year!)

- Wesley and Whitefield exhaust me just reading about them!
- Moody's bed time prayer was often, "Lord, I'm tired, Amen."

B. Notice Paul's source of energy.

As in 1:10–11, we see **blending of human effort and divine enabling.**

- **Though the work is laborious; Christ's energy is limitless.**
- Though he's struggling, this does not mean "it's all up to him."
- God will empower him to do the work that he called him to do.

Here is the source of our strength: **Christ in us.**

- Our strength is not in how long we've been a Christian;
- How much we know about the Bible;
- How long we've been in ministry; but...
- It's in our union with Christ!

Spurgeon (ht: JP)

"No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear ... I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with four thousand members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, The Sword and the Trowel to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of five hundred letters to be answered." This, however, is only half my duty, for there are innumerable churches established by friends, with the affairs of which I am closely connected, to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me"

At his 50th birthday a list of 66 organizations was read that he founded and conducted. Lord Shaftesbury said, "This list of associations, instituted by his genius, and superintended by his care, were more than enough to occupy the minds and hearts of fifty ordinary men"

He typically read six substantial books a week and could remember what he read and where to find it.

He produced more than 140 books of his own. He often worked 18 hours in a day.

The missionary David Livingstone, asked him once, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?"

Spurgeon replied, **"You have forgotten there are two of us"**

That's the good news; Christ is in you - the hope of glory!

Christ is not just our grand subject of our preaching and teaching and evangelism and counseling; he is also the source of our energy!

Let's keep proclaiming Him until we see Him!