

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS*Part Six***Introduction**

“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, 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, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 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. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (**Colossians 1:24-2:5**).

Introduction

1. In the previous lesson we completed our look at Paul’s discourse on Jesus’ preeminence – in relation to God, creation, and the church (**1:15-23**).
2. This next section (**1:24-2:5**) has reference to Paul personally, in which he speaks of his sufferings and labor in the gospel. This can be broken down into two parts: (i) his sufferings and labor in the gospel as an apostle to the Gentiles (**1:24-29**), and (ii) his sufferings and labor in the gospel as one who is deeply concerned for his brethren (**2:1-5**). The subject itself was introduced in the previous verse when he said, “... and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (**1:23**).

Paul’s Sufferings And Labor In The Gospel – 1:24-2:5

**VIII. AS AN APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES**

“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, 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, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ among you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (**Colossians 1:24-29**).

1. Paul had been appointed an apostle to the Gentiles by Jesus Himself (**Galatians 1:11-12**), and had continued to zealously preach the gospel since that day.
 - a. But wherever he preached he encountered opposition and persecution. Yet he rejoiced in his sufferings because it was through them that he was brought into a closer fellowship with Christ. For in each suffering he experienced something of what Jesus experienced (**Philippians 3:8-11**), and you know how people that have experienced the same thing are drawn together.
 - b. Paul says, “... and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ”. These words are difficult and there are various views on its meaning. But I tend to agree with Walton Weaver, who says, “The want or deficiency which he saw was in the extent to which his own afflictions had failed to match those of his Lord’s. He had not gone all the way to death in them”.

2. All the sufferings that Paul endured in preaching the gospel were for “the sake of His body, the church”. Paul bore sufferings for the good and profit of the spiritual body, “that the Gospel might continue and be blessed to the conversion of many, for the increase of the church and additions to it, and for the furtherance of the Gospel, and that such who professed it might be established and confirmed in it, by the sufferings of the apostle for it: and such good effects did follow upon his sufferings and afflictions; they were for the consolation of many souls, the strengthening of weak believers, and causing even preachers of the Gospel to wax more confident, and more boldly preach the Gospel without fear of man” (Gill).
3. Paul describes himself as a “minister” or servant of the church. He did not seek to be a servant, but was “made” a servant of the church “according to the stewardship of God” or in accordance with His divine plan for saving the world.
 - a. Some object to the idea that the “stewardship of God” means “in accordance with His divine plan for saving the world” on the grounds that it was something “given to me”, and so they say it refers to Paul’s commission.
 - b. I believe that both ideas may be present and that the meaning is, that Paul was a minister according to the plan of God, but it was the execution of this plan that was given to him.
4. Paul was made a minister in order to discharge his responsibility or commission in preaching the “word of God” or the message of the gospel.
 - a. Paul further defines what he means by “the word of God” as “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints”. The things that God had kept hidden were now being revealed by Paul. God had revealed to the prophets of old that He would make provision for the Gentiles, and constitute part of His people, but had not explained how this would be achieved – it was a mystery!
 - b. What had been hidden, Paul now revealed – The church was a new creation of God that Jesus established, and both Jews and Gentiles are admitted into the church, or the body of Christ, on the same terms (see **Ephesians 3:1-13**).
5. The mystery that Paul revealed through the gospel makes manifest “the riches of the glory of this mystery”.
 - a. “The full wealth of the divine mercy and goodness (God’s glory) has been revealed in the inclusion of the Gentile peoples of all the world in the saving purpose of God” (Erdman).
 - b. The whole of this glory is summed up as “Christ among you”, i.e., “Christ is revealed among you as the source of the hope of glory in a better world. This was the great truth which so animated the heart and fired the zeal of the apostle Paul” (Barnes).
6. There are some that insist that the most important thing is to preach Christ, not doctrine. Here, though, we see that Paul (and the other apostles) preached Christ (“Him we preach”), but they also warned and taught. So often we see this pattern: the truth about the person of Christ is established and then the practical application is made to a person’s life. This shows that the truth about Christ is to have a positive effect on believers.
 - a. To whom was the warning and teaching directed? In this one sentence Paul says “every man” three times. Unbelievers were to be warned and taught, and believers were to be warned and taught. The purpose of warning and teaching is to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”.
 - b. Paul labored and strove in order to accomplish his goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. But he acknowledges that all his efforts were according to Christ’s working which worked in him mightily.

So often we see this pattern: the truth about the person of Christ is established and then the practical application is made to a person’s life. This shows that the truth about Christ is to have a positive effect on believers. Teachers would do well to follow this pattern.

IX. AS ONE WHO IS DEEPLY CONCERNED FOR HIS BRETHREN

“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (Colossians 2:1-5).

1. As well as the outward sufferings he endured in the preaching of the gospel, Paul also had to deal with inward struggles or anxieties in connection with the spiritual welfare of his brethren.
 - a. It is the prevalence of false teachers that likely caused this “great conflict” within Paul; he was deeply concerned for their spiritual welfare.
 - b. Paul is anxious that their hearts might be “encouraged” or “strengthened”. “It was not consolation that was required, but confirmation in the right faith” (Abbott). The brethren needed to be strengthened in order to advance the faith and be equipped to face the threat of false teaching.
2. The inner strengthening of which Paul speaks takes place when all the members of the body are “being knit together in love”. Walton Weaver says, “When love is the principle that unites a congregation of the people of God they are thereby strengthened to oppose all false teaching. In 3:14 Paul calls love the ‘bond of perfection’. Only where Christians are bound together in love one for another can true strength exist”.
 - a. It is when we are being strengthened and united in love that we attain to “all the riches of the full assurance of understanding”. The Greek word *plerophorias* means *full conviction* or *complete certainty*. This was likely needed because of the prevalence of false teachers.
 - b. The full assurance of understanding has the full “knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ” as its object. There is much dispute regarding the later part of this verse, but the original text appears to have read “the mystery of God, of Christ”. Hence, the NASB reads, “...resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself”. This means that the mystery of God is Christ Himself. “God is fully made known or revealed only in Christ because He is God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16) (Walton Weaver). Christ is the “mystery” in the sense that he had not before been revealed as He was at that time through the preaching of the gospel.
 - c. It is in Christ that all wisdom and knowledge are available. This is likely speaking against those that claimed a superior knowledge gained through their relation with a supposed hierarchy of supernatural beings.
3. Paul wants the brethren to have a complete comprehension of the mystery of God as he was now revealing because such would arm and prevent them from being deceived. The way they deceived people was by means of “persuasive argument” (cp. **Romans 16:18; 1 Corinthians 2:4**). The arguments of false teachers often seem plausible, but they are false!
 - a. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, and so it was impossible for him to be physically present with them. However, though physically absent, he was with them “in spirit”.
 - b. It was Epaphras that brought Paul news of the Colossians, and rejoiced to “see” (i.e., know of) their “good discipline” (i.e., their well-ordered behavior) and “the stability of your faith in Christ”.

“The riches consist of this full conviction or certainty, so that the result of being strengthened spiritually and united in love is a wealth of complete certainty or conviction” (Walton Weaver).

Gnosticism was a philosophical system that was founded on pagan Greek philosophy. The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.” The Gnostics claimed to have an exclusive kind of “higher knowledge” that wasn't available to the common man. Gnosticism said that matter was evil but spirit was good. And therefore, said the Gnostics, God could not have created the material universe. The Gnostics also had a very un-biblical view of Jesus Christ, and their idea of salvation was not salvation from sin, but a philosophical or psychological kind of salvation that was only available to an “in group” that possessed “higher knowledge” of God's will - that is, higher knowledge than the Bible.

Applications

1. Those that preach the gospel and become acquainted with congregations in various places develop an emotional attachment for the brethren, and a great concern for their spiritual welfare. Thus he spends much time in prayer for their spiritual progress. It is quite right that brethren know about this deep concern because it is encouraging for the brethren and helps to form closer ties.
2. Whoever the false teachers may be operating in our day, we can only be prepared if we are all knit together in love and have a complete comprehension of the true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself.
3. Once we come to understand that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, then will have no desire to seek wisdom and knowledge elsewhere.
4. False teachers deceive people with "persuasive words", i.e., arguments that seem very plausible. This is why it is essential to "test the spirit" against the truth of God's word. The best thing, of course, is to avoid false teachers altogether.
5. Paul rejoiced to see (through the eyes of Epaphras) their good discipline and stability of faith. Let us be sure that we are doing all we can to ensure that the same could be said of this congregation.

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