

Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

The Demanding Privilege of Making Known the Mystery of the Gospel

Introduction: Many Christians are making a big mistake. They see Christ as a means to an end when He is actually the be all and end all of their existence. They see faith in Christ as the way to a happy life, the path to earthly success or comfort, or the solution to their present problems.

Don't get me wrong; a sincere, devout Christian faith may in fact make you happy or more successful and may even solve some problems for you. But in the end, those are all simply optional byproducts. They are the potential icing on the cake. The bottom line is that Christ is worthy of our worship. Loving and serving Him in complete obedience is only giving Him what He deserves. If we end up with Jesus and a life of suffering for His sake, we are still blessed by eternal heavenly standards, because Christ is worth more than everything this world has to give.

Obedience, maturity and steadfastness; whatever we suffer in this world, we gain far more in Christ.

- I. God does not call every Christian to a pleasant life or an easy ministry. 1:24-27
- II. God does call every Christian to press on toward maturity in Christ. 1:28-29
- III. God also calls every Christian to remain steadfast in the faith. 2:1-5

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- I. God does not call every Christian to a pleasant life or an easy ministry. 1:24-27

1:24-25 **what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ** Paul does not mean that there is anything lacking in the sufferings of the death of Christ. There is nothing we can add to that because the atonement is entirely complete in what He already did. We can neither add to nor take away from what Christ has accomplished on the cross.

What Paul means is that the proclamation of the gospel, the **stewardship** or responsibility he was given by God, involves suffering. This is the experience of many believers; they suffer for the sake of the gospel. They suffer out of obedience to the calling they have received.

According to Elam Ministries, there are presently 26 Christians in prison in Iran alone, serving time as a result of their faith. One of them, Yousef Nadarkhani, has been sentenced to death for apostasy. He was a Muslim who converted to faith in Christ.

Closer to home, Jason and Ewa Barnaby have a friend named Kelly Steffen who has a unique story of sacrifice. She and her husband were Campus Crusade missionaries in Turkey. By all accounts they were doing a great job – learned the language, etc. Then her husband was diagnosed with an aggressive tumor in his brain. He died in 2006. She has continued in ministry as a single mom with two small boys and now serves at Butler here in town. Visit her blog, entitled *The Sufficiency of Grace* at <http://kellysteffen.blogspot.com/>

From the day of his conversion, Jesus promised Paul that his ministry would require suffering:

Acts 9:15-16 NKJV ¹⁵ "...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

God does not call everyone to a pleasant life or an easy ministry. He does call us to obedience.

1:26-27 **mystery** This is how Paul describes his message. It does not refer to anything mysterious as if there were some secret ritual he was given to perform. We can define it as:

Some sacred thing hidden or secret which is naturally unknown to human reason and is only known by the revelation of God (Complete Word Study Dictionary)

So, Paul is speaking here of God's unfolding plan for the world and, above all, his plan of redemption through the Messiah. The gospel could only be understood when it was finally revealed by God. In is a *mystery*, in that sense of the biblical word.

At the heart of this mystery is one mind-blowing feature of the new covenant, **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. God himself, in the person of Christ, will now be directly and personally present in the lives of his people. His presence assures us of a future life with him when he returns. Moreover, Christ does not reside only in believing Jews but also in believing Gentiles; there is now one unified people of God. At the time of Paul's writing that was a radical revelation. *(See also ESV Study Bible)*

Think about this: If you have received new life in Christ, God dwells within you. How would your attitudes or priorities change if you were more mindful of that reality day by day?

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II. God does call every Christian to press on toward maturity in Christ. 1:28-29

1:28 Paul breaks down his ministry here into several different areas:

- **Preaching** is to proclaim or announce. Notice that Paul preaches Christ.
- **Warning** is connected with repentance, refers to one's conduct, and is addressed primarily to the heart.
- **Teaching** is connected with faith, refers to doctrines, and is addressed primarily to the mind or understanding.
- He wants to do this **in all wisdom**, using all the wisdom that he possesses.
- **Every man** In other words, **his goal is for every believer** to become
- **Perfect** that is: Mature, complete, full-grown; perfectly instructed in doctrine, full-grown in the faith and mature in the way they live out the Christian life.

Illustration: When I first became a believer it was mostly through reading the Bible. I had never been to a Bible-teaching church and took a good 7 years for me to commit to one. Eventually I connected with a church, a home fellowship and a group of Christian friends and mentors. Consequently, I began to mature. Once I committed to a church body, things began to change; I began to grow up in Christ. This is what God always wanted. He wanted it for me and he wants it for each of you. This is how the Christian faith works – period.

1:29 Paul acknowledges that he labors and strives in his ministry. Maturity does not come easily, even in the ministry of an apostle, but he knows deep down that the results of his labor are really the result of **Christ working in him mightily**. Paul talked about this elsewhere:

Php 2:12-13 NKJV ¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

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III. God also calls every Christian to remain steadfast in the faith. 2:1-5

2:1 The picture Paul paints is one of an inward contest of anxiety. He is very concerned about these Colossian and the nearby Laodicean believers – believers he didn’t even know first-hand.

Laodicea As it turns out, Paul’s concern was justified. By the end of the 1st Century, not so long after Paul died, Jesus spoke to the Apostle John who was exiled on the island of Patmos – another believer who had to suffer as part of his ministry. Here is Christ’s message to that Laodicean church:

Revelation 3:14-22 NKJV ¹⁴“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, *‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—¹⁸I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””*

The Laodiceans bought into the lie that obedience was supposed to be easy. They materially well off, so they figured they were just as well off spiritually. Jesus said they were wrong.

2:3 **In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** Think about that for a moment. Christ is the supreme treasure house of divine wisdom and spiritual knowledge. He is the be all and end all of our existence. If you want to learn anything, learn about Jesus first.

2:4 This is the purpose of Paul’s letter: to prevent their being deceived by plausible arguments. (IBC) False teachings grow where the knowledge of God’s word is weak. It is very easy to exchange Christ, God’s ultimate treasure house, for the counterfeit wisdom of the world.

2:5 God calls us to be **steadfast** in our faith. The word picture shows a military line that is not broken and does not retreat – a defending army that holds its ground. Our faith needs to hold its ground in our hearts, because obedience may not be easy and our faith will be under attack.

Conclusions: Obedience, Maturity and Steadfastness

1. **God does not call every Christian to a pleasant life or an easy ministry.** If you're Paul the apostle or Yousef Nadarkhani in Iran, you may have to endure imprisonment and possibly even die for your faith and your ministry. If you're Kelly Steffen, you may become a young widow and raise two small boys as a single mom, but keep going in ministry nonetheless. God often achieves His purposes through us in ways we might not choose. Obedience may not be easy.
2. **God does call every Christian to press on toward maturity in Christ.** This will mean diligent effort to grow in our understanding of the God we worship.
 - a. False teachings grow where knowledge of God's Word is weak. Biblical teachings have always been and always will be under attack, so maturity is going to involve a willingness to apply ourselves to a bit of doctrine. We have to be willing to learn.
 - b. It also means we have to be willing to change from old sinful patterns to new sanctified ones. Many people never come to a state of maturity because they are simply unwilling to give up their sins. We have to learn right from wrong and be ready to do the right.
3. **God also calls every Christian to remain steadfast in the faith.** The Christian life, especially one devoted to ministry, can bring difficulties. For that reason, we have to be sure we hang on tightly to Jesus. We can't let anything that happens to us damage our relationship with the Lord. As we said earlier, our faith needs to hold its ground in our hearts. The line of defense, like a military fortification, cannot be broken and is never allowed to retreat.

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Final Passage:

Ephesians 4:11-16 NKJV ¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of **the knowledge of the Son of God**, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of **the fullness of Christ**; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things **into Him who is the head—Christ—**¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Final Prayer:

Father, please make us willing to accept that obedience may not be easy. Help us to value Christ above all else and make Him our first priority. By loving and serving Him help us to give Him all that He truly deserves. Help us to grow in our understanding of you, through constantly applying ourselves to the study of your word. Help us to become mature in both our faith and our behavior. And help us to remain steadfast in the face of all the enemy's attacks, never giving him an inch of ground in our hearts, so that our faith in You will stand firm all the days of our lives, for the glory of Jesus' name. Amen.