

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (9)
Proclaiming Jesus Christ (Col. 1:24-29)

In Colossians 1:21 the Apostle Paul declared that Jesus Christ had secured salvation for His people through “His body of flesh through death.” Paul assured these Christians at Colossae that although they had been formerly “alienated and hostile in their mind doing evil deeds, the Lord would present them on the Day of Judgment as “holy, blameless, and above reproach.” But then Paul included a condition for these believers in Colossae, which is set forth in verse 23, “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Their future blessing of salvation was contingent upon their persevering faith in Jesus Christ.

The apostle set forth the absolute necessity to persevere in faith in the Lord Jesus. There is no promise of salvation for the temporary believer, the apostate. Salvation belongs to those who have true faith. True faith is an ongoing, overcoming, persevering faith in the Lord Jesus. Here we see a condition set before us for our salvation. This condition does not put our salvation in doubt. This condition does not mean that our salvation ultimately is due to what we do or do not do. This condition certainly does not mean that a true Christian can lose his salvation. But it is a true condition that all true Christians meet, by the grace of God.

The Holy Scriptures tell us in many places and in many ways that the Lord will keep His people in faith. He does so by His power. Those that are Christ's, who have salvation, “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). Perseverance in faith and obedience is one of the grand distinguishing marks of a true child of God.

The Scriptures contain many statements that address this matter. There are those verses that speak of God's *ability* to keep His own in faith.¹ There are those verses which speaks of the *certainty* of God keeping His own.² But even though it is God who keeps His people secure so that they will persevere, the Scriptures also speak of the Christian's *responsibility to keep himself in faith to Christ*. This is what we have before us in Colossians 1:22 and 23.

²²He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, ²³*if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...*”

Here are some other verses that speak of this great responsibility that we have to persevere by God's grace:

1 Timothy 4:16 -- “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. *Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*”

1 Corinthians 15:1ff -- “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, *if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain.*”

Hebrews 10:35-39 -- “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:* ³⁷For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. ³⁸Now the just shall live by

¹ Phil. 3:20f; 2 Tim. 1:12; Jude 24f.

² Job 17:9; Jer. 32:37-42; Ezek. 36:22-27; John 6:35-40; 10:27f; 17:11f; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:8f; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:13f; 5:23f; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:4f; 1 John 2:1; Jude 1.

faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. ³⁹But *we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*”

Now, Paul had been expressing his prayerful concern for the Colossian Christians that they might grow spiritually, that they might increase in the knowledge of God. This knowledge of God includes an understanding of who God is, and who His Son is, as well as knowing in a measure the nature of the work that God was doing through His Son. Paul had declared that God through His Son is reconciling the world to Himself; that is, through Christ God is bringing His creation back into willing subjection to Himself. And we saw that involved in this work was God reconciling His own people--Christians, those who are in Christ--bringing them into relationship with Himself, for He had purposed to present them before Himself one day “holy and blameless and beyond reproach.”

We now come to 1:24ff. In this paragraph, which continues to the end of the chapter, Paul reveals his own heart’s desire for their spiritual well-being. He wrote of his sufferings that he had endured for their sake. He speaks of his unique calling of God and the message that had been entrusted to him. And because of his sense of calling, and the importance of his message, and because of his heart for them, he expresses the nature of his work--proclaiming Jesus Christ. Let us read our passage:

²⁴Now 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, ²⁵of 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, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷To 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. ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.

It may help us to understand our passage by considering the following outline:

- I. Suffering hardship on behalf of the church (1:24)
- II. Ministering the word of Christ to the church (1:25-27)
- III. Proclaiming Christ to each member of the church (1:28)
- IV. Laboring earnestly, being empowered to serve the church (1:29)

I. Suffering hardship on behalf of the church (1:24)

Paul declared, “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...” Paul’s life was full of suffering for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Due to the fall of mankind into sin, life in this fallen world is characterized by suffering. It was Eliphaz, one of Job’s “friends”, who wrote, “Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). As certain as the sparks of a campfire ascend into the sky, it is that certain that man will encounter a life of trouble in this world. Later Job would affirm this assessment of life. “Man who is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Life is full of suffering; it is the lot of this fallen, earthly existence. We suffer wrong-doing at the hands of others. We suffer shame due to our own wrong-doing. We suffer pain, both emotional and physical. It is our portion to encounter suffering in all its forms.

That this life is filled with trials and troubles was the concluding observation of the wise man, Solomon.

“For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? ²³For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.” (Ecc. 2:22f)

Solomon wrote similar words later in Ecclesiastes 5.

As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return,
To go as he came;
And he shall take nothing from his labor
Which he may carry away in his hand.

¹⁶And this also is a severe evil—

Just exactly as he came, so shall he go.

And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

¹⁷***All his days he also eats in darkness,***

And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger. (Ecc. 5:15-17)

But although all people everywhere will experience trouble in this life, trouble comes to different people due to different causes and comes to different people in different degrees. Trouble “falls out” differently for those who know the Lord and for those who do not. With regard to the people of God, the troubles that we experience are redemptive and therapeutic, for the Lord has promised to protect and preserve His people. For example, we read in Psalm 84:9ff of God's promise to His people:

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;

Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah

⁹O God, behold our shield,

And look upon the face of Your anointed.

¹⁰For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God

Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹For the LORD God is a sun and shield;

The LORD will give grace and glory;

No good thing will He withhold

From those who walk uprightly.

¹²***O LORD of hosts,***

Blessed is the man who trusts in You!

(Psa. 84:8-12)

But of those in the world whom the Lord does not favor, those who are outside of a saving, covenant relationship with God, their troubles are curses. Their difficulties are punitive; God punishes them for their iniquity. We read in Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

What can be said of God's wrath against rebellious Judah can be said to be normative for God's dealings with all those who are estranged from Him due to sin. God declared, “Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them. The neighbor and his friend shall perish’” (Jer. 6:21). And although God withholds the manifestation of His judgment for a time due to His mercy, His wrath accrues in degree and in amount until it is finally released upon His enemies.

But some kinds of suffering are unique to the saints of God. Because we know God and represent Him in a fallen world, the fallen world reacts to us. And people of the world will often manifest an unreasonable aversion toward us that may from time to time burst forth upon us. And so, although those who live without God and in a manner in violation of God's laws will incur great difficulty in this world, in some

ways the people of God can expect to encounter greater hardship than what many others experience in this life.

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they would encounter trouble because of their relationship with Him.

¹⁸“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:18-21)

But the Lord will deliver all of His people out of their troubles, bringing them into His heavenly kingdom. Paul wrote, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:18). Thank the Lord for that assurance. Our troubles are short-lived. There is an end to them.

Of course the Lord has various purposes for allowing, yes, even appointing suffering to be the experience of His people. What are some of God’s purposes in our sufferings? We may cite several.

(1) We become *more able to minister to others* through the grace that we received from God while in our trials. Paul could write of this in 2 Corinthians 1:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (2 Cor. 1:3-6).

(2) God takes us through extreme difficulty in order that *we would learn to trust Him*. We read on in 2 Corinthians 1:8ff

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. ***But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*** ¹⁰He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.” (2 Cor. 1:8-10)

(3) God will allow us to encounter “evil” and difficulty in life in order for us *to reassess our values and reprioritize our desires so that they conform to God’s purposes for us*. We may read an Old Testament prophecy of God’s work of grace among His people. “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD” (Mal. 3:3).

(4) God allows us to encounter evil in order that *we might learn to be strong and steadfast in adversity*. In this way we become stronger Christians prepared to face and overcome greater difficulties in the future.

²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2f)

And so, it is the way of the Lord with His people that they encounter and experience trial and trouble in this life in this world. We can expect it! Paul wrote the Thessalonians: “For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know” (1 Thess. 3:4). And Peter wrote to “those who resided as aliens”, “the elect of God”:

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.”

No, suffering is not unusual for the Christian; rather, we are called to encounter it in all its forms.

But note further what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:24, “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...*” Paul wrote of doing his part, fulfilling his obligation, fulfilling his responsibility. There is a degree and amount of suffering that the Lord has appointed for His people. Each of us has a share of this to bear. We are to do so willingly and in a responsive manner that pleases the Lord.

When I read this statement I was struck with the question, “Am I doing *my* share?” “Am I doing *my* part?” “Am I fulfilling *my* obligation, my responsibility on behalf of Christ’s body, His church?”

And I would ask you, “Have you done *your* part? Have you been willing to bear *your* portion of the load?” “Are you doing *your* share?”

Now what Paul was talking about specifically was the suffering that he had encountered because of having faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. And Paul was willing to encounter these obstacles and suffer the reproach of Christ, writing this very letter from a prison cell because of his resolve to stand for Christ and proclaim the gospel. He could write: “I’ve done my share on behalf of His body and I rejoice in having done so.”

But I wonder if we could say the same? It is easy to forego the hardship that faithful disciples experience by simply remaining silent or refusing to take a stand at key times and places. There are times when in the world we are asked to do something that, as a Christian, we are forbidden to do. Do we maintain our conviction and politely refuse, being willing to accept the consequences, or do we comply, violating our conscience, compromising the Word of God, but thereby avoid the hardship, which would certainly have come our way?

Or what of our witness for the gospel? You know it is true, that if you speak openly of Christ and His gospel you will suffer persecution; and we can so easily avoid that uncomfortable situation simply by remaining silent, after all, few of us enjoy confrontation.

Now as we look at the last clause of **verse 24** we see a rather puzzling statement: “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...*” In verse 22 Paul had declared that the Lord Jesus had reconciled His people unto God “in His body of flesh by his death.” Here Paul was saying that he was bringing benefit to the church through his own sufferings. What is meant by this? Surely he is not saying that somehow we are assisting in further payment for sins through our suffering coupled with Christ’s suffering. Of course not, but that is what Our Roman Catholic friends are taught of this verse. It is construed that the saints in some way supplemented the saving work of Christ, thereby investing themselves with authority that belongs to Christ alone. We repudiate any such notion. No. What Paul was saying is that Christians fulfil Christ’s sufferings *ministerially*, for the sake of others, but not *mediatorially*, that is as a sacrifice on behalf of others, for only He, who was “holy, harmless, and undefiled”, can suffer and die in the place of sinners.

Matthew Henry explained the matter this way:

He was a suffering preacher: *Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you*, v. 24. He suffered in the cause of Christ, and for the good of the church. He suffered for preaching the gospel to them. And, while he suffered in so good a cause, he could rejoice in his sufferings, *rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer*, and esteem it an honor to him. *And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh*. Not that the afflictions of Paul, or any other, were expiations for sin, as the sufferings of Christ were. There was nothing wanting in them, nothing which needed to *be filled up*. They were perfectly

sufficient to answer the intention of them, the satisfaction of God's justice, in order to the salvation of his people. But the sufferings of Paul and other good ministers made them conformable to Christ; and they followed him in his suffering state: so they are said to fill up what was behind of the sufferings of Christ, as the wax fills up the vacuities of the seal, when it receives the impression of it. Or it may be meant not of Christ's sufferings, but of his suffering for Christ. He *filled that which was behind*. He had a certain rate and measure of suffering for Christ assigned him; and, as his sufferings were agreeable to that appointment, so he was still filling up more and more what was behind, or remained of them to his share.³

Now verse 24 is part of a long, compound sentence, which includes verses 24 through 26. But because of the change of subjects within this sentence, we will consider the next emphasis in our passage, which we might describe as Paul...

II. Ministering the word of Christ to the church (1:25-27)

The sentence continues with **verse 25**. Let us read the entire sentence again:

²⁴Now 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, ²⁵*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*, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Paul describes his calling of God to serve the church. God has called him to be a minister of the gospel with his chief duty to preach the Word of God. He had become a "minister." Here he uses the Greek word, δίακονος (*diakonos*), which is translated elsewhere as "deacon." A "deacon" is a "minister" to the church.

This ministry of Paul was "*according to the stewardship from God*." God had called him to this ministry. God to whom he would have to give an account entrusted Paul's ministry to him. "For it is required that a steward be found to have been faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Paul would be accountable to God even as God had directed and equipped him to serve His people on His behalf. This stewardship of ministry that God gave to Paul was for the advantage of the church, not for himself. Paul was gifted and enabled by God, but Paul was responsible and accountable to God for what he would do and how well he would do his ministry for the Lord's people. A calling of God to serve the people of God brings great responsibility and accountability.

The nature or essence of the ministry to which Paul was called to the church was "to make the Word of God fully known." A man neglects his ministry, betrays God's calling, and fails the church of Jesus Christ, if he fails to proclaim the truth of the Word of God. It is God's Word that is pre-eminent. God has a word for His people, and He calls and equips ministers of the gospel to proclaim His Word to His people.

There has always been those in the churches that have decried the need for a unique calling of God to become a minister of the Word of God. We would affirm on the basis of this verse, and we could cite others, that, indeed, one must be called of God to enter into this most important endeavor. The great need of churches is to have faithful, God-called and equipped men, who will faithfully and without fear proclaim the Word of God to God's people.

Several things can be said about a **minister of the Word**: We see (1) that he can only become a minister through God's calling him, (2) the ministry should be regarded as a "stewardship" before God; (3) that his ministry is for the benefit of the church, and (4) the chief duty or responsibility is for him to make known "the Word of God."

Beginning with **verse 26** and on through **verse 27** we read of *Paul's principle message from God that he was to give the people of God*.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming Revell), 754.

²⁴Now 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, ²⁵of 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, ²⁶***the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*** ²⁷***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.***

What was this message? It is described as a "mystery" in verse 26. It was a message that was formerly concealed and now revealed--that the Gentiles would be incorporated along with the Jews into the common life of the body of Christ.

This is not to say that the Old Testament did not speak of salvation extending to the Gentiles, for it did speak repeatedly of the day when the Gentiles would experience God's salvation. But the form or nature of that salvation experience--being one with the Jews in Christ as the one people of God, the one body of Christ-- had not been known until Paul was called and entrusted with this message.

Elsewhere Paul could write of this "mystery":

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- ²if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³how that by revelation He made known to me ***the mystery*** (as I have briefly written already, ⁴by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. ⁸To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. (Eph. 3:1-9).

What was the heart of this mystery? Paul states it in **verse 28**, "***which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***" The mystery involves our spiritual union with our Savior, Jesus Christ. All the favor and blessing that God shows to His people and that He will bestow upon His people is due to their union with Jesus Christ--"Christ in you."

What is "***the hope of glory***"? It is the confidence that God will most certainly bestow upon His people "glory" on the day of their resurrection, when they inherit the glory that God has prepared for them from eternity. What is the nature of this "glory"?

(1) It is the glory of Jesus Christ Himself. Paul wrote:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, ***for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (2 Thess. 2:13f)

(2) This glory is the glory of sharing in the inheritance that belongs to Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs-- ***heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ***, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be ***glorified*** together. ¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with ***the glory*** which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to

futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into *the glorious liberty of the children of God*. (Rom 8:15-21)

(3) *The glory that God will bestow upon us includes sharing in the rule of Jesus Christ in His kingdom.* Of Christians in glory it is said,

⁴They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ⁵There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. *And they shall reign forever and ever.* ⁶Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." (Rev. 22:4-6)

We, who are only deserving of everlasting shame, everlasting rebuke, and everlasting punishment, are due to receive "glory", even a share in the glory of Jesus Christ, in whom and with whom we will have inherited all things. Can we fathom the wonder of this prospect? After all, only God is due "glory." He alone is deserving of honor and power. But to those who are *in Christ* and Christ is found to be *in them*, this same glory, the glory of God as it were, will be bestowed.

Does that seem to overstate the matter? Consider what our Lord Jesus prayed to His Father: "Father", said our Lord, "I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." And then He said, "*And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them*" (John 17:22).

The prospect of realizing this "glory" is a cause of great "hope"; that is, it is a basis for great encouragement and a cause for much motivation to serve Him in love. This "hope of glory", or the prospect of our being glorified fills us with hope. And what is the assurance, the certainty for this hope? "*Christ in you*, (which is) the hope of glory."

And so in the light of this truth, what do we do? We are to be...

III. Proclaiming Christ to each member of the church (1:28)

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

And so, what are we to do? First,

A. "We Proclaim Him"--Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is to be the subject of our teaching and preaching. As Paul declared elsewhere, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5). Here the apostle set forth the nature of true biblical, Christian ministry of the Word of God. It is the setting forth of Jesus Christ to the people.

John Gill set forth the matter clearly with regard to preaching Jesus Christ:

Under the above considerations; as the riches, the glory, and the mystery of the gospel; as the hope set before lost sinners to lay hold upon; as the only Savior and Redeemer, by whose righteousness believers are justified, through whose blood their sins are pardoned, by whose sacrifice and satisfaction atonement is made, and in whose person alone is acceptance with God: Christ and him crucified, and salvation by him, were the subjects of the ministry of the apostles; on this they dwelt, and it was this which was blessed for the conversion of sinners, the edification of saints, the planting of churches, and the setting up and establishing the kingdom and interest of Christ...

Amen, John Gill.

A true Christ-centered ministry is one that proclaims Jesus Christ pre-eminently. He is the subject of sermons. He is at the heart of the teaching of the church. He is the topic of discussion of the people of God. He is the focus of our attention, our affection, and our proclamation. There are many evangelical churches

that claim to be “Christ-centered”, but in reality they are centered on other matters. They are often people-centered, perhaps even centered on lost people. But the church is to be truly Christ centered, even Christ saturated. In Him alone is there spiritual life that the church needs and on which the church thrives.

We proclaim Christ. However, we proclaim Him in a manner so that lives are affected by Him. And so we read that Paul, secondly, declared that he...

B. “Admonish every man”

We are seeking to bring every thought and every deed into subjection to Him. If this is to be thoroughly done, then there will be times when the minister of the gospel will need to admonish or rebuke wrong behavior, wrong attitudes, or wrong thinking. But in addition, we are to be...

C. “Teaching every man”

The people of God need instruction as to who God is, Who His Son is, and how they might live before Him in a manner pleasing to Him and in a manner worthy of their high calling. Pastors are essentially teachers. Paul wrote of the ministers whom the Lord Jesus calls and commissions to serve in His church:

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 (Eph 4:1 NKJ)

And to what end are we to admonish and teach everyone? *“that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”* This goal of Paul's should be our goal as a church. We should desire and work to the end that everyone of us is mature in Christ Jesus. We read lastly that the apostle was...

IV. Laboring earnestly, being empowered by the Lord to serve the church (1:29) “For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.”

Paul frequently set forth the grace of God as being the cause and source of all blessing. He frequently set forth the Lord as being sovereign in the dispensing of His grace to His people. But Paul never presumed upon the grace of God. It did not lead him to be passive or inactive. He was the hardest worker for the kingdom that served the Lord in the first century. Paul himself made that claim:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; *but I labored more abundantly than they all*, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)

The presence or measure of the grace of God at work among the people of God should never lead to presumption or passivity. The one who has the grace of God working in him and through him will be the hardest working Christian in the crowd. In verse 29 we read that the apostle labored at this task, as should we. And if the apostle was in need of God's power working mightily in him to accomplish this task, most certainly do we. And so, let us pray to that end.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)
