

## PAUL'S MINISTRY

### **TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:23-29**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Twice in our text the apostle Paul says, "Whereof I am made a minister" (1:23, 25).
2. Paul was a minister of the New Testament church (1:24b, 25a), "according to the dispensation ("stewardship") of God" (1:25).
3. In II Corinthians 11:23, Paul calls himself a "minister of Christ."
4. In II Corinthians 6:4, Paul calls himself a "minister of God."
5. Paul was a minister "of the gospel" (1:23).
6. The words "minister" and "ministry" are often misunderstood. While Paul's emphasis is on preaching, ministry is much more than just preaching.

#### **I. THE MESSAGE OF THE MINISTRY -- the Gospel (1:23)**

1. Paul says in verses 27b and 28a, "Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach." So Paul's message was, "Christ...Whom we preach." This is our message -- we preach Christ.
2. Christianity is not a set of rules or a code of conduct. It is not just another religion like Judaism and Islam and Hinduism, etc.
3. Christianity is a living Person. Paul's message was, "Christ...Whom we preach."
4. But it is not enough that Jesus came to earth, and died for our sins on the cross, and rose from the dead. The Bible says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27b). We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.
5. Our Lord said in John 14:20, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."
6. Many people understand the facts of the Gospel intellectually, but have not grasped this important truth -- "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27b).
7. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Christ must be welcomed into the soul by repentance, enthroned in the heart by faith, enjoyed in the mind by surrender, and manifested in the life by obedience" (*Studies in Colossians*).
8. "The hope of glory" (1:27b) -- we are just pilgrims passing through life. Our eternal home is in heaven.
9. Paul was a minister "of the gospel" (1:23), "which was preached to every creature which is under heaven."

10. In Paul's day he could say that the Gospel was preached "in all the world" (1:6). Unfortunately that could not be said today. Today there are millions of people who have never even heard about Jesus.
11. Some Bible teachers say the word "world" (*kosmos*) in verse 6 means "the Roman world," but here in verse 23 Paul says the Gospel "was preached to every creature which is under heaven."
12. Paul wrote this epistle from a prison in Rome. Nevertheless he could "rejoice" in his sufferings (1:24).
13. Paul said to the elders in Ephesus, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24).
14. Paul's message never changed, whether he was in prison or out of prison. And our message today is unchangeable.
15. Paul indicates in verse 24 that his personal sufferings were "distinguishable from and yet identifiable with those of Christ" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Studies in Colossians*).
16. "The afflictions of Christ" (1:24) are not referring to our Lord's sufferings on the cross which were perfect and complete (1:20).
17. Our Lord's sufferings on the cross cannot be supplemented because they are complete and eternal in their efficacy. Paul is referring here to our Lord's sufferings here on earth.
18. When the apostle Paul suffered, Christ suffered. When Christians suffer, Christ suffers because we are His body (1:24b; cf. 1:18a).
19. When Saul was on the road to Damascus, before he was converted, the Lord said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4).
20. Saul replied, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5).
21. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "We can have fellowship with His afflictions and also imitate His patience and courage in suffering" (*Studies in Colossians*).
22. Griffith Thomas said, "This is the real meaning of suffering, namely, the education, training, and disciplining of the soul" and he referred to Hebrews 5:8, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

23. Colossians 1:25-27 contain two important New Testament doctrinal words: dispensation and mystery. H.A. Ironside said, "A dispensation is that particular order or condition of things prevailing in one special age which does not necessarily prevail in another."
24. A "mystery" in the New Testament refers to some truth developed in the New Testament but not understood in the Old Testament. Some examples would include:
- "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).
  - "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11).
  - the union of Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 3:3-6).
  - the rapture of the church (I Cor. 15:51).
  - the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:32).
  - the mystery of iniquity (II Thess. 2:7).
  - "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT" (Rev. 17:5-7).

## **II. THE METHODS OF THE MINISTRY (1:28) -- preaching**

1. Preaching, warning, and teaching (1:28) were the methods of Paul's ministry, and the methods of every Bible preacher.
2. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2).
3. Warning, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting is all part of Bible preaching.
4. Paul went on to tell Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (II Tim. 4:3). That "time" has come.
5. "Warning" -- admonition is very important. In the case of those who are lost they need to be warned about judgment and hell.
6. And believers must be warned also, since believers can easily backslide.
7. Paul told the elders of Ephesus, "By the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

8. He said to them, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house...For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:20, 27).
9. "Teaching every man" (Col. 1:28) is part of the Great Commission. Our Lord said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19, 20).
10. W.H. Griffith Thomas said our preaching should "refresh the jaded spirit, inform the inquiring mind, comfort the anxious heart, and guide the submissive will" (*Studies in Colossians*).
11. Note the repetition: "every man...every man...every man" (1:28). The Gospel is for "every man." Our Lord said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).
12. People all over have the same need for salvation.
13. The words "in wisdom" (1:28) are important. This letter was written to warn the church in Colosse about the error of the Gnostics. Paul often contrasted the wisdom of true Gospel preachers with the foolishness of the false teachers (cf. 2:1-4).

### **III. THE MOTIVE OF THE MINISTRY -- perfection**

1. The motive: "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (1:28b).
2. The object of Paul's ministry was the perfection of the saints. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "This also we wish, even your perfection" (II Cor. 13:9).
3. Paul said God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge

- of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).
4. Perfection means maturity, and in the Bible it refers to our goal. Our Lord said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).
  5. James 1:4 says, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."
  6. There should be steady progress in the Christian life. Perfection does not mean "sinless perfection." It means progress; it means maturity.
  7. W.H. Griffith Thomas says it refers to a "symmetry of character -- the heart purified, the will controlled, the mind instructed, the imagination healthy, the conscience sensitive, the body sound" (*Studies in Colossians*).
  8. This is all possible because we are "in Christ Jesus" (1:28b; cf. 1:27b; 2:10).
  9. This was Paul's motive -- to present his converts to Christ "perfect in Christ Jesus" (1:28b), free from everything that is worldly and unholy.
  10. This is why Paul "labored" and "strived" (1:29). This was his motivation, and it is the motivation of every good preacher.
  11. But Paul did not labor and strive in his own strength (and neither do we), but "according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (1:29).

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. We have here in this text a wonderful summary of the Christian ministry.
2. It is indeed a great blessing to be in the ministry of the Gospel.
3. The Psalmist said, "Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure" (Psalm 103:21).
4. The key is we are "in Christ" and Christ is in us (Col. 1:27, 28).
5. Someone put it this way: "See the poker grown hot in the flames -- the poker in the fire; yes, but the fire in the poker. Look at that bath -- the sponge in the water; yes, but the water in the sponge" (Guy King, *Crossing the Border, An Expository Study of Colossians*).