

Colossians 1:24-29

Presenting Every Man Complete in Christ

When was the last time that you knew you had to do something, but were quite unsure of how to begin?

- You weren't unsure why you had to do something
- You were unsure how you would carry it out

To be honest, that is where Duen, Jacob, and I are in terms of being your pastors

- We know what we are to do
- We know why we are to do it
- But the how is not so easy

As your pastors, we have spent a significant amount of time discussing the monumental task of shepherding this local flock

- To be honest, it can be overwhelming

But we can't become gridlocked in a paralysis of analysis

- In other words, we can't throw our hands in the air and become discouraged

Instead, we have to begin somewhere

- We have to take action steps

One of the short-term goals that we have is to contact you via telephone every month

- Each elder has around 20 families to contact every month

As you see in the bulletin on page 2, you will see a breakdown

- So if your last name is N-Z, then you should expect a phone call from me by the end of May
- Jacob and Duen will be contacting those in their range as well

Every few months, we will switch groups

- That way, each elder has the opportunity to interact with every person in the flock
- And each person in the church has an opportunity to be under the leadership of each elder

One of the texts that drives us as elders is Hebrews 13:17

- Listen to these powerful words, "**Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.**"

Duen, Jacob, and I will stand before God one day and give an account for how we have served as elders/overseers/pastors/shepherds

- That is a sobering thought

What might you expect from these monthly contacts?

- How we can get to know you better (friendship)
- How we can pray for you and your family
- How you are doing at reading the Word, praying, serving in the local church, etc.
- How we can serve you better
- Accountability for attendance, serving, etc. at CBC

I will be honest and tell you that I have never done anything like this before

- I have never been in a church where the elders contacted every member and regular attendee on a consistent basis

Why would we do this?

- Why would we exert so much effort and time in contacting every family every month?

A short answer is that we believe God would be honored in our doing so!

- We believe that God is glorified when the pastors attempt to shepherd the flock!

We don't want CBC to be a place just where the Word is taught faithfully

- We want CBC to be a place where the flock is shepherded faithfully

Another Biblical Text that drives us as elders is found in Colossians 1:24-29

- This will be our preaching Text this morning

The book of Colossians is a short book

- 95 verses

But don't let the size of the book lead you to think that it is insignificant

- Quite the contrary!

The apostle Paul did not found the church at Colossae

- It is doubtful whether he even visited the area
- A man named Epaphras was the man through whom God used to found this church

Paul was in a Roman prison when he penned the book of Colossians

- Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians are frequently called "prison epistles"¹

Epaphras had made his way to visit Paul in prison in Rome

- Epaphras told Paul about the heretical teaching that was threatening the well-being of the church at Colossae and the surrounding regions²

This may not sound like much, but the heresy was quite severe³

- It had Jewish elements
 - o Legalism
 - o Ritualism
 - o Meticulous observance of holy days
- It had pagan elements
 - o Philosophy
 - o Higher knowledge
 - o Worship of angels

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Colossians*, 28.

² Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Colossians*, 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 166-68.

- It had Christian elements
 - o “While at its heart it was a combination of Judaism and paganism, it wore the mask of Christianity. It did not *deny* Christ, but it did *dethrone* him. It gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place.”⁴

So Paul pens the words of Colossians for several reasons⁵

- To warn these believers (many of them Gentiles) from relapsing back into their pre-Christian pagan vices
- To direct their focus on Christ, the God-Man, in all His glory
- To remind them of how much Epaphras loves them and intercedes in their behalf

Let's read Colossians 1:24-29

In these six short verses, Paul unpacks five (5) essential elements that are needed in order to carry out Gospel ministry

- Joy (1:24)
- Faithfulness (1:25)
- Christ (1:26-27)
- Maturity (1:28)
- Power (1:29)

I. Joy (1:24)

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

As Paul sits in a Roman prison, one would think that he would be complaining

- But not Paul

On the contrary, Paul actually exudes joy!

- Joy in spite of his circumstances

This is the same man who sang hymns with Silas after being beaten in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25)

- Even in the midst of pain, they sang praises to the Name of the Lord

Joy is never contingent upon how we are feeling or what is going on around us

- Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)

But notice why Paul is rejoicing, “**I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake**”

- Paul had a great love for these believers

The staggering thought is that Paul hadn't met most of these believers

- He hadn't founded the church
- He hadn't led many of them to faith in Christ

Yet he can say, “**I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake**”

- It seems odd, doesn't it?

⁴ Ibid., 167-68.

⁵ Hendriksen, 22-23.

If we are honest, we don't rejoice in our own sufferings

- Let alone suffering for someone else

and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

The second half of verse 24 has sparked serious discussion over the years

- What does Paul imply by these obscure words?

The Roman Catholic Church uses this verse to assert that Christ's atonement is defective

- Christ's work may be part of the solution, but it is not enough
- The suffering of the saints somehow "adds" to the meritorious work of Christ

The Catholic Church teaches salvation by works⁶

- Purgatory
- Attendance at Mass
- Purchase of indulgences

Of course, this is blasphemy!

- Christ's work on the cross was sufficient!

When Christ said, "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30), He meant it!

- Not Christ plus anything
- But Christ alone!

Paul is not insinuating that he can somehow add to the efficacy of Christ's atonement

- That would be to run completely counter to what he teaches throughout the NT

Because the believer is united to Christ, he should expect to receive similar treatment

- "**If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you**" (John 15:18-19)

Suffering is not an optional part of the Christian life

- Christ said, "**In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world**" (John 16:33)
- "**all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**" (2 Tim 3:12)

Paul was more than willing to suffer on behalf of the Church

- Listen to what Jesus told Ananias about Saul in Acts 9, "**Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake**" (9:15b-16)

Because Paul aligned himself with the Lord Jesus Christ, he fully expected to suffer

- If we align ourselves with Christ, we had better expect suffering as well
- The world will hate us!

⁶ Hendriksen, 87.

There has been a lot of talk lately about Christians losing certain rights

- The National Day of Prayer is being considered unconstitutional

Why does this surprise us?

- We ought to be surprised that it has taken this long for the world to do something

Suffering and persecution have always had a purifying effect on the Church

- Our Americanized view of Christianity could use some purification

We have redefined the Christian life to be a life of ease and comfort

- Paul reminds us that the Christian life is a call to suffer
- It is a call to follow Christ

In the book of Philippians (a book written around the same time as Colossians), Paul wrote these words, “**that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death**” (Phil 3:10)

- We want to know Christ
- We want to know His power
- But how many of us really want “**the fellowship of His sufferings**”?

It with joy that we as your pastors take up the daunting task of shepherding

- We resolve to discharge our responsibilities joyfully, not grudgingly

We realize that the task isn't easy

- There will be suffering
- There will be sacrifice

But we resolve to shepherd you with joy

- Just like the apostle Paul did with the believers at Colossae
- **Joy (1:24)**

II. Faithfulness (1:25)

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit,

Paul viewed himself as “**a minister**”

- Actually, this was the Greek word for a common servant, *diakonos*
- The basis for our English word deacon

Was Paul an apostle?

- Yes

Was he a chosen instrument?

- Yes

But Paul viewed himself as nothing more than a servant

- A slave of Christ!

He viewed his ministry as part of “**the stewardship from God**”

- We don’t use the word steward much these days

Americans tend to use words like owner instead of steward

- We forget that we own nothing
- Everything belongs to the Lord!

The Gospel didn’t belong to Paul

- But Paul was given a stewardship of the Gospel

Once again, notice how Paul connects his service with the phrase “**for your benefit**”

- Why did he suffer?
 - o “**for your sake**”
- Why did he serve?
 - o “**for your benefit**”

that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God*,

Paul was entrusted with the Gospel as a steward so that he might “**fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God***”

- The apostle wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel!
- It was the good news!

As a matter of fact, listen to what Paul told the Corinthian believers, “**For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.**” (1 Cor 9:16-17)

We your shepherds recognize the tremendous stewardship that has been placed upon our shoulders

- “**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**” (Acts 20:28)

How are you doing with the stewardship entrusted to you?

- Spiritual giftedness
- Spiritual responsibilities
- Money and possessions
- Health
- Time
- Spouse
- Children
- Work

We are not perfect shepherds

- We will make mistakes
- So please give grace, be patient, and pray for us

But we truly desire to be faithful in shepherding this flock

- **Joy (1:24)**
- **Faithfulness (1:25)**

III. Christ (1:26-27)

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints.

Paul transitions from discussing the word of God to discussing “the mystery”

- This is a truth that was previously concealed but is now revealed

The OT gave hints about the coming of the Messiah

- The OT gave hints about the New Covenant

But as we stand on this side of the cross, we see just how grand the New Covenant is!

- Gentiles and Jews on equal footing!
- That is something totally unheard of in the Old Testament

27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.

What did God want to reveal through this mystery?

- Here in verse 27 Paul highlights “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles”

Let’s turn back to Ephesians 2 to see this kindness in action

- “Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands — *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” (2:11-16)

How gracious and kind God is to the Gentiles!

- We have been grafted in
- We have been accepted in the Beloved
- We have been made equal heirs with the believing Jews

which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

It would be easy for us to talk more about this “mystery”

- We could discuss the theological significance of this term
- We could trace where this term is mentioned in the NT

But I love how Paul transitions from talking about the mystery to talking about Christ

- The end of verse 27 says simply, “**which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**”

It’s as if Paul is saying, “You want to know what the mystery is all about? I’ll tell you. It’s ‘**Christ in you, the hope of glory**’”

Think of the significance of this phrase, “**Christ in you**”

- No OT saint could claim that
- No person living during the Gospels could claim that

Only those of us during this unique Church Age can claim this

- Christ indwells every believer

Of course, He does this through the ministry of the Holy Spirit

- The Spirit points us to Christ

At some point in the history of CBC, this phrase was put on the wall behind this pulpit

- Christ in you, the hope of glory

There are a lot of slogans that they could have put on a church wall

- But they chose this one

It really is a summary statement of the mystery of the New Covenant

- It is a wonderful reminder of the privilege that is ours

We can talk about the Gospel here at CBC

- We can preach the Gospel
- We can share the Gospel
- We can treasure the Gospel

But don't equate the Gospel with mere

- Data
- Facts
- Information

The Gospel is all about Jesus

- A Person, not a system

As your elders, we have some goals in place

- But the obvious goal that overrides all others is this
- **That the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified, honored, and praised more than everything else**

We want to point you to Christ

- He is the Chief Shepherd
- He is the Good Shepherd

- **Joy (1:24)**
- **Faithfulness (1:25)**
- **Christ (1:26-27)**

IV. Maturity (1:28)

28 And we proclaim Him,

It should not be surprising, then, that Paul returns to the thought of preaching from verse 25

- But notice the subtle, yet powerful, change

Paul doesn't preach a system⁷

- He doesn't preach data
- He doesn't preach rules

Paul preaches Christ, “we proclaim Him”

- He proclaims the living, glorious reality of Jesus Christ!

As a pastor, I don't preach a particular system of theology

- I preach Christ

I have men who I respect highly

- Calvin
- Luther
- Spurgeon
- Lloyd-Jones
- MacArthur
- Lawson
- Sproul
- Piper

But I don't preach these men or their system of theology

- They can't save anyone!
- They can't sanctify anyone!

No, I preach Christ!

- He can save!
- He can sanctify!
- He is the object of our focus and worship!

admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom.

But Paul doesn't stop with preaching Christ

- In other words, the apostle isn't content with people coming to faith in Christ

Paul mentions two (2) specific methods by which he ministers

- “admonishing every man”
- “teaching every man”

In some ways, these two verbs are not that different from one another

- But in other ways, they are slightly different

“admonishing” is a term that can cover the nuances of

- Warning
- Stimulating
- Encouraging

⁷ Vaughan, 193.

“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31, emphasis mine)

- “with tears” tells us just how passionate Paul was for these believers at Ephesus

“teaching”

- This is the process of imparting instruction in either a public or private setting

“admonishing” has the overtones of correcting bad habits

- “teaching” has the overtones of imparting sound instruction

It’s not either/or

- But both/and

Shepherding is much like parenting

- We must correct wrong behavior
- We must impart instruction in order to correct the bad habits, thoughts, and actions

But don’t miss the phrase “with all wisdom”

- We admonish and teach “with all wisdom”
- Not with our common sense, feelings, or personal opinions
- Of course, wisdom comes from the Word of God

that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Did you notice the threefold emphasis on “every man” in this verse?

- “admonishing every man”
- “teaching every man”
- “that we may present every man complete in Christ”

What a scope!

- What a goal!

This is the goal of Ephesians 4 which was read earlier

- The whole body – and every believer within – striving toward unity, knowledge, and maturity

Paul wasn’t content just to reach “some”

- No, he wanted to reach “every man”

Paul’s goal was “that we may present every man complete in Christ”

- This is staggering!

“complete” could be defined in other ways

- Perfect
- Mature

This is not a low, easily attainable goal

- This is a high, humanly impossible goal!

It is true that this will be impossible this side of glory

- No believer will be 100% perfect this side of heaven

But that doesn't stop us from aiming toward that goal, right?

- Why would we set a lesser goal?

Duen, Jacob, and I are so burdened for you

- Our goal is the same as Paul's

We pray to the end that "every man" would be "complete in Christ"

- Every believer would be pursuing maturity and completeness in Christ

- **Joy (1:24)**
- **Faithfulness (1:25)**
- **Christ (1:26-27)**
- **Maturity (1:28)**

V. Power (1:29)

29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

You may be asking, "But how in the world can three men attempt to shepherd this entire church?"

- That's a great question
- One that we have been chewing on for some time

On the surface, it almost seems foolish for every elder even to attempt to reach out to 20 families

- That's a ratio of almost 50 individuals to 1 pastor

If the task was left up to us, we would have already given up

- We would have already thrown in the white flag

But I am so grateful that the task is not left up to us

- Let's notice Paul's words here in verse 29

Paul writes, "And for this purpose also I labor"

- What purpose?
- That of presenting every man complete in Christ!

Toward that goal Paul says, "I labor"

- This is a word that means to labor or exert energy, even to the point of exhaustion

In other words, this task of shepherding and ministering to the believers at Colossae was an exhausting, tiresome work

- It was not a light task
- It was one that weighed heavy on the heart of Paul

But Paul doesn't stop there

- The verse continues, "And for this purpose also I labor, striving..."

That word "striving" is the Greek word ἀγωνίζομαι

- We receive our English word agonize from it

It was a term borrowed from the athletic arena⁸

- It was a word that indicated intense exertion

Athletes don't go out just to have a good time

- They go out to exert energy in order to defeat the other team!

So Paul says, "I work to the point of exhaustion, agonizing toward the goal of presenting every person complete in Christ."

- But is this it?
- Is it all up to Paul?

Certainly not!

- Read the rest of the verse, "**And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me**"

From Paul's perspective, what is required of him?

- To labor
- To strive

But there is a Divine power that energizes, sustains, and empowers Paul in his ministry

- Paul's striving is not according to his own ability, strength, and resources

I want you to look at Colossians 4:12

- Paul tells the church at Colossae about how Epaphras prayed for them
- "**Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God**"

Notice how Paul connects the thought of earnest praying with earnest shepherding

Epaphras "**always laboring earnestly**"

- That is the same term that Paul used to describe his own ministry

Epaphras prayed toward the goal "**that you may stand perfect**"

- That is the same goal that Paul had in mind in Colossians 1:28

Here are two great examples – Paul and Epaphras – of men who understand the task of shepherding

- Paul is an example of teaching and admonishing
- Epaphras is an example of praying

- **Joy (1:24)**
- **Faithfulness (1:25)**
- **Christ (1:26-27)**
- **Maturity (1:28)**
- **Power (1:29)**

What is the desire of the elders for this church?

- Our desire is, I pray, what God desires for this church

⁸ Vaughan, 193.

The pastors shepherd to the end that

- Every believer might grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
- Every believer might know his/her spiritual giftedness and serve faithfully
- Every believer would live a sacrificial lifestyle in order to give sacrificially to this Gospel ministry
- Every believer would attend the church services regularly – not just Sunday mornings but also Sunday School and Sunday evenings
- Every believer would be involved in the lives of other Christians (not in cliques or the same small group of friendships)
- Every believer would be reading, studying, and memorizing the Word of God
- Every believer would be fervent in praying
- Every believer would submit to the pastoral leadership of this local church
- Every believer would pursue unity and peace
- Every believer would pursue and accept forgiveness with one another (instead of holding grudges, resentment, and bitterness)
- Every believer would demonstrate the Christ-centered life in the home
 - o Husbands being the selfless, sacrificial leaders
 - o Wives being the humble, gentle, submissive helpmates
 - o Children being obedient followers of Christ (not just moral rule keepers)
- Every believer would faithfully proclaim the Gospel to believers and unbelievers

Not just some believers

- But every believer

As Paul said in Colossians 1:28, “**And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ**”

- It may be a high goal, but what other goal could we have?

Oh, that CBC might be a church where

- Christ is proclaimed
- The Gospel is treasured
- Humility is prized
- Unity is pursued
- Prayer is practiced
- The Scriptures are loved

Some of you might be thinking, “Kevin, that is a bit idealistic, isn’t it?”

- The sad reality is that we live in an American bubble
- We have redefined Christianity to where it is comfortable instead of costly

Just this morning I received an email from a pastor friend in Austin, TX

- He is involved with church planting

My heart is heavy. And I think God is revealing my lack of faith. When I see Christians not loving people far from God, I see not just a "lack of evangelism" but a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel itself. The idea that we gather for the sake of gathering is far from the early church who gathered because they had to – because persecution drove them to it. And because they were living God's mission, because they were being the church instead of going to church...And that's because they were living the mission. They were engaging people right and left. They were not running from the world but running to it just as God sent His son INTO the world.

But all this cannot happen unless God's Spirit moves in a remarkable way. Please pray for me. Pray that I will pray. Pray that I will trust. Pray that I will surrender my inability to God's ability, my weakness to his strength, my fickleness to his faithfulness. And go to God's throne and ask him boldly to move believers to take intentional steps towards loving people in need of Jesus.

How about you?

- Where do you need to step it up?
- Where do you need God to change your life?

I assure you that Duen, Jacob and I love you

- We want to love you more
- We want to shepherd you

So understand when we start calling you next month, this is our heart

- We simply want to present you – EVERY one of you – complete/perfect/mature in Christ

That is our labor of love

- That is our goal

We need your prayers

- This will not be an easy task
- But it is a necessary task

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Cor 15:10)

- It's by the grace of God that we are here in this place
- It's for the glory of God that we are here in this place

Gospel invitation to those who are not believers

- Repent
- Trust in Christ

Call to repentance for those who have not been following Christ

- Lack of passion
- Lack of zeal