

**June 1, 2008**

Colossians 1:28-29

Good morning. I'm glad you are back today. Grab your Bibles and I invite you to turn to Colossians chapter 1 with me. If you are a guest today, the way that we study the Word of God is just going to the next passage in the book we're going through. Today we come to Colossians 1:28-29 but you need to know that these verses are connected to what we've been looking at the past few weeks. Paul is still defending and describing his ministry but what we looked at last week is the truth - that even if you aren't like Paul - even if you don't have a call from God to be a vocational pastor or missionary - the truth is that every one of us who has been saved and forgiven and redeemed and reconciled by Jesus Christ is a servant and a minister and as such the principles of what we see in Paul here apply to every one of us. This morning as we go through the passage, instead of saving the application to you and me for after we look at the text, we'll make those applications as we go. Alright - let's get started. Col. 1:28-29.

"We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me."

Paul says "**we proclaim Him.**" We there is emphatic - in other words Paul is purposely setting himself and Epaphras and any other teacher of the true gospel in opposition to the false teachers who are distorting the truth at the church in Colossae. We are not like them. Why? Because we proclaim Him.

"**Him**" of course is **CHRIST**. At the end of verse 27 Paul says that the mystery that God is revealing to them - to us - is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And then Paul says "we proclaim Him" WE proclaim CHRIST. The false teachers were doing everything but that - they were doing all they could, remember, to displace Christ - to down play and distort Christ. Which is why we saw Paul say back in verse 19 that God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ - Jesus is God and that is who is in us - that is who is our hope of glory - that is who we proclaim.

Folks I told you last week that the most important factor about choosing a church is what is taught in the pulpit. The other things are important - but what is taught makes all the difference. And here Paul even qualifies that. If all you ever hear is 5 steps to a happy home or 4 ways to financial freedom or 3 keys to perfect parents or 2 ways to deal with death - even if all of that is based on biblical principles - if you never hear the name of Jesus - his life - his death - his resurrection - his salvation - his return - his judgment on sin - then don't bother. **We exist to proclaim Him - not just the MORALITY of his teaching, Amen?!**

And I want you to notice the word Paul uses here. He says we "proclaim" Him. The King James is the only version that uses the word "preach" there and that's not a good translation. This word "proclaim" is more than just preaching or teaching in a formal setting. "**Proclaim**" simply means to **PUBLICLY declare a completed truth**. It is a speaking forth - a purposeful sharing of the truth. So again this is not just about preachers or pastors - this is about every one of us. We - you and me - are to proclaim Him.

Now does that mean we go to the mall and start accosting each passerby and saying if you don't repent and come to Jesus you're going to burn in hell? No - of course not. That's not personal evangelism that's what JI Packer in his book Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God calls "impersonal evangelism." Listen to this, he says "the indiscriminate buttonholing, the intrusive barging in to the privacy of other people's souls, the thick-skinned insistence on expounding the things of God to reluctant strangers who are longing to get away...[is] a travesty of personal evangelism....In fact, rudeness of this sort dishonors God...creates resentment, and prejudices people against the Christ whose professed followers act so objectionably." That's not what Paul is talking about.

What this challenges us to realize is that we hear a lot about being examples – which is very important – but nobody’s going to follow you into the Kingdom of God unless you open your mouth sooner or later. I’ve said it before & I’ll say it again – **lifestyle evangelism that never intentionally speaks the GOSPEL is not evangelism and will not be enough.** We – you and I – have got to proclaim Jesus.

Paul builds on that as he goes on in verse 28, he says, “**admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom.**” There are two parts to this Paul says. The second one we get – teaching. That kind of comes naturally. Teaching means imparting positive doctrine – positive truth. Whether that be in a formal setting of a small group Bible study, a sermon, Sunday school class or just in the purposeful transfer of that truth through conversation when someone asks you for advice and you tell them what the Bible says, when you teach your kids the values and principles of life in Christ day to day, usually the teaching part here isn’t hard because usually you are in a situation where you’ve been asked or given the right to present the truth. The one challenge here is one of evaluation – are you? In those situations – when you guide your kids, when you give advice, even when you make policies – **whenever you’re given a chance of any kind in life are you teaching – are you imparting positive – BIBLICAL – truth?** Or are you doing what seems best to you – what every one else does – or what makes you most comfortable?

So there’s teaching, but Paul also says a part of this proclaiming Jesus is admonishing. This is more the negative side, I guess. **Admonishing is giving encouraging counsel in view of SIN and coming punishment.** The King James uses the word “warning” and that’s not bad – it’s telling someone if they continue on the road they’re on – big or small – they’ll end up in trouble or pain or whatever negative consequence is out there. This is before the advent of DVD screens in the headrest of the mini van, Dad saying over his shoulder “If you kids don’t quiet down I will turn this car around!” You know what I mean? “Don’t make me come back there!”

But seriously – this is caring enough about someone in your life that you don’t want to see them crash & burn in some area in their life. And that sounds great – but it can be hard. It will take some courage and it will take some boldness at times. And yet **2 Thess 3:14-15** tells us it is always to be done in love. Notice the definition was encouraging counsel in view of sin. Not sarcastic putdowns of someone’s weakness – not prideful judgment of someone’s failures – not tearing into someone to show you are right – but at least from our side it is encouraging counsel – **sharing the truth in LOVE even when they may not want to hear it.**

I’ve said this before but this issue of admonishing is one of our weakest areas of obedience in the body of Christ. You know why? Because it is uncomfortable. And because we’re selfish. Think about it – if you have a friend that you can see is making bad decisions – is falling into a habitual sin – is showing signs of a significant problem, you have to decide what you care more about. **Do you care more about the FRIENDSHIP you have with that person and your comfort in it or do you really care about the PERSON?** Are you willing to risk the friendship – risk that person blowing up at you and not receiving what you say in order to warn them in love OR do you choose to watch them flush that area of their life without saying anything in order to stay comfortable in your friendship with them? Paul says we admonish – we love the person more than our comfort – and we proclaim Christ.

And in case you are of the mindset for some reason that that is the church’s job – the pastor’s job – or a counselor’s job – once again remember this is for every one of us. **Colossians 3:16** just a few columns over says “Let the word of Christ dwell in *you* richly as *you* teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, ...” – this again is the responsibility of every one of us. And not only is it for every one of us, look at who Paul says it is aimed at. “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone.” The Greek there actually says admonishing everyone and teaching everyone.

It isn't our job to decide who we tell. Well, I've known Bob for a long time, Bob says he is a Christian – he goes to church some – he'll figure out sooner or later that what he's doing is wrong. And then Sue – I've worked with Sue for years, she's agnostic or she's Catholic or she's Buddhist – whatever – I can't really share my beliefs with her, she already has hers. Whatever it might be – you can come up with a million examples or excuses of why certain people aren't the kind of people who you ought to teach, admonish, or proclaim to. But folks listen to me – believer or not, church-goer or not, whatever the excuse – **“Everyone” indicates that if God has given you a relationship with someone, one of the reasons in the heart of God is for you to PROCLAIM HIM in it, teaching and admonishing every chance you get.** Not because you're perfect. Not because you have all the answers. But because Christ in you the hope of glory loves that person and wants their best in His will.

“We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom.” **Wisdom here is talking about biblical principles. It is talking about taking the truth and making it APPLICABLE** – making it useable – making it present and now. It means when we proclaim Him, we don't just present cold hard facts and walk away – we proclaim to persuade. We want people to hear and respond – we can't control their response but we want to communicate with all wisdom so that when we are done they are going to say “I understand what he said and I am going to do it” or “I understand what he said and I am not going to do it” but never “I don't understand what he said.” The continual example in Scripture is the presentation of truth followed by an invitation to apply it. Even the book of Colossians is an example of that, basically you have two chapters of mostly theology and then you have two chapters of mostly so what – application. We proclaim Him – we admonish – we teach – everyone with all wisdom – so they can, in fact so they have to, respond.

Why? Why is this what Paul writes here? Look at what he says next. **“...so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”** The goal of ministry – the goal of all that Paul has been saying is that we might present everyone perfect in Christ. The word perfect there is the word for complete or mature. And that is what we strive for – **what we strive for in ourselves and in those we influence is MATURITY in Christ.** Turn a few pages back to Ephesians chapter 4 and we see this again. Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 11 through 15 (TEXT)

That we might present everyone mature in Christ – what does that mean God's goal for you and me and all of us? **Romans 8:29** says God predestined us – planned us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son – that we might be like Jesus. And folks we will be. Every one of us who truly knows Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, and Treasure will be like Him – **1 John 3:2** tells us we are children of God and when Jesus appears – when He returns, we will be like Him. Until then we pursue that goal – growing in maturity day by day.

Even Paul said in **Philippians 3** that it is a process in verse 12 when he said: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

And how does that process work – how does it get accomplished? Turn with me to **2 Timothy 3:16-17**: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Verse 17 literally says “so that the man of God may be *complete* or *mature*, equipped for every good work.” We saw last week the importance of the fullness of the Word of God – its priority in our lives – and here's why. **We become complete – we become mature – we become perfect in Christ by taking the WORD of God – the truth – and making it the FOUNDATION of our lives.** A child matures because he eats. A Christian matures because he feeds on the Word of God. So I want you to see a crucial truth here, **the goal of this ministry – the goal of our church – the goal of every believer is not just to bring people TO Christ, we're to bring those in Christ to MATURITY.** I

wish we had more time to talk about that, but I'm sure it will come up again in this letter, so let's keep going.

Again, Paul is inclusive in this goal. He says so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. Everyone again. He's saying we're not like the false teachers there in Colossae who say there is only an elite few who can really get in on this – no, it is for everyone – by implication of course, everyone who will listen to the proclamation, the admonishing, and the teaching. He's saying again like we saw last week – this everyone isn't just the Jew – but for the Gentile – this opportunity is for everyone. But when it comes to us today in understanding and application I want you to see yourself in that everyone.

I want you to think of someone who you admire spiritually – someone who you not idolize but someone who defines for you a lot of what it means to be a mature believer – a good Christian – someone who you see Jesus in their life. And then look at me. You can be like that. You can be like them. You can move past them. Because **maturity in Christ is not just for the elite few or the specially gifted or the uniquely trained – maturity in Christ is for everyone who WANTS it.** It is God's goal for you! And that is something to be excited about!

And that's what Paul says next. See when you step back and look at all we've seen the past three weeks or so; we see Paul defining himself as a servant. We see him suffering for the truth – taking the hits that are meant for Jesus. We see him even rejoicing in that suffering for the progress of the body of Christ. We see him proclaiming the mystery God has revealed and we see him today admonishing and teaching everyone – setting his focus on the endgame – on the maturity of all in Christ – and in that I've got to ask how! How does he do all that? Look at what he says last. Verse 29: ***“To this end I labor, [what end? To present everyone perfect in Christ] struggling with all His energy which so powerfully works in me.”***

**Both of the words “labor” and “struggling” there are serious EFFORT words.** Labor has to do with the idea of working to exhaustion. Struggling literally is the root of our word “agony.” So Paul is taking about serious effort here. Listen, in the same way we saw in verse 24 that we will never really make an impact for the Kingdom of God until we are willing to suffer for the truth, **we will never see maturity in our lives or impact God's Kingdom unless we are seriously WORKING at it.**

We say we want to be mature Christians but we aren't having a quiet time or praying or studying the Word or memorizing God's truth.

We say we want to be good parents or spouses but we aren't doing anything to put God first in our home, we aren't praying with or for our kids or spouses.

We want God to bless us financially but we aren't willing to tithe or even sacrifice to make offerings with what He has given us.

We want to see friends or family come to Jesus and escape Hell but we are unwilling to work in prayer and word and deed to give them a chance.

Folks that isn't going to cut it. Verbal wishing didn't do it for Paul and won't do it for us. Because the truth is, **you BECOME tomorrow who you are BEING today.** So Paul says I know the goal is maturity in Christ for me and all those I touch – so to that end I labor, I struggle now.

You say, Brett – that sounds an awful lot like works theology – like it is all about me and my effort and I earn my way into it. Well in one way it is. God does not force us to grow up. He call us – he invites us – he tells us – he points us – he even disciplines us – but it is up to us to respond – to work – to put forth effort. BUT – don't tune me out here – read the last half of the verse.

***“With all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.”*** Remember the source of Paul’s ministry – of all we’ve seen in this chapter – was God. That’s not just about origin – that’s about strength. **We work – God EMPOWERS.** And that is true all through the Word of God. I want you to listen to it:

- 2 Pet 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”
- 1 Jn 4:4 “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”
- 2 Cor 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”
- Phil 2:12-13 “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Or just look back at verse 27: the mystery God has revealed to us is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Folks we are not alone in ministry. We are not relying on ourselves when it comes to proclaiming or admonishing or teaching. We are not the source of our joy in suffering or our humility in service. We are not independent in the process of maturity. Yes we work hard – yes we make the effort – take the steps – use the opportunities. But **the only way we can do that – the only way we can grow in maturity is because of the power of Jesus WITHIN us.** And praise God that is exactly what we have – Christ in you the hope of glory.

You know from verse 23 to the end of chapter 1, Paul has given us an incredible look at his ministry. And now we are faced with what he said in **Philippians 4:9** “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Let’s pray!