

A Ministry of Mysteries

September 24 – Colossians 1:24-29

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Day 266 – 99 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul expanded on his title as “a minister of God” (v.23), as well as the responsibilities that accompanied it (v.24-29). He wrote, “Of this church, I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me...” (v.25). **He understood that his ministry was a calling of God and that he was responsible to God for his role.**

First, **he brought attention to his persecution and imprisonment.** “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...,” he wrote (v.24). Paul was not seeking sympathy, nor was he being prideful. In truth, he far understated his experiences by calling them “sufferings.” He also said that he endured them “on behalf of [Christ’s] body, which is the Church,” and that he endured them gladly.

Next, he added, “I do my share in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (v.24). At first glance, it might seem that Paul was discrediting the suffering of Christ, but that is not the case. Why would Paul, who was writing to convince the Colossians of the sufficiency of Christ, call their attention to anything that was lacking in Christ’s person or ministry? That wouldn’t make sense.

We must remember that Paul used references to Christ’s body and the Church interchangeably, perhaps because of his encounter with Him on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9*). When Jesus spoke of the persecution of the Church, He asked Paul (then Saul), “Why are you persecuting Me?” (v.4, 5). In other words, any attack on the followers of Christ (the Church) was an attack on Christ Himself. Also, Jesus said to His disciples that because the world persecuted Him, it would persecute them (*Jn. 15:19, 20*). Therefore, it was expected that the Church would experience great suffering until Christ’s return. Paul was simply stating that he was receiving his share of that suffering.

Paul continued by explaining that **one of his roles as an apostle was to “carry out the preaching of the Word of God”** (v.25). The Word of God is the gospel or “the mystery which has been hidden from the past generations” (v.26).

In the Old Testament, God’s people were kept in the dark regarding several aspects of His plan. He often foreshadowed or prophesied His intentions, but they were still veiled to the eyes of His people. Thus, they were mysteries, events that He would reveal and fulfill later. Therefore, Paul’s letters are littered with mysteries that God has unveiled to us who live in the New Testament. For example, in this passage, he mentioned two mysteries — that the Spirit of God would indwell His people and that the salvation of His people would include individuals from all nations (v.27).

Finally, Paul wrote that **his ministry included “admonishing and teaching every man, so that [he] may present every man complete in Christ”** (v.28). He added, “For this purpose I labor...” (v.29). What Paul meant by complete is to make ready, to mature or perfect. We, of course, cannot become perfect in this life, but rather his goal was to disciple the people of God so that they could better understand and live out their faith. He did this by admonishing them, which means to warn, to reprove, or to counsel. He also taught them.

Leading one to Christ is only the beginning. Evangelism must always be followed by discipleship, and that discipleship is not of our doing but the Spirit’s. Paul wrote that he was “striving according to God’s power, which mightily works within me” (v.29).

Daily Reflection

The Gospel of Christ is a wondrous mystery in which we get to participate. What is your calling? What is your role? Are you doing your part to fulfill Christ’s mission?

Captives

September 25 – Colossians 2:1-8

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Day 267 – 98 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul expressed a concern that the Colossians were being taken captive by persuasive false teachers (v.4). Even though he had never been to Colossae (v.1), he struggled in prayer on their behalf, making sure they knew that he was with them in spirit, even though he was not with them in body (v.5; 1:9). His prayer was that they would attain understanding of Christ's true identity and work on their behalf (2:2, 3).

What follows is a formula for combatting false doctrine (v.6-8). Since they had already "received Christ," he challenged the Colossians to "walk in Him" (v.6), to pattern their lives after His, to obey His instructions, and to submit to His leadership. Part of that walk is being disciplined in the foundations of Christianity, the core doctrines of the gospel.

Paul wrote, "having been firmly rooted" in Christ (at conversion), now they needed to be "built up in Him and established in their faith..." (v.7). This "building up" was already happening, perhaps through Epaphras (1:7), as they "were instructed and overflowing with gratitude" (2:7). However, these things were only the beginning and did not shield believers from the dangers of false teaching. Therefore, Paul continued, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception..." (v.8). Let's look at the four parts of this verse.

First, **we have an enemy who wants to take us captive**. Satan despises truth, particularly the gospel, and he desires to steer people away from it. What does captive mean? He is not referring to salvation, but to the mind. The Colossians had already received Christ (v.6), so Paul was warning them against false teachers. Imagine an American soldier sitting in an enemy prison. Is he still American? Of course. Is he still a soldier? Yes, but he's not in the battle. A captive Christian is still a Christian and still a soldier, but he's not effective in the battle. He's been sidelined or taken captive by the enemy.

Second, **one of the ways that Satan takes us captive is through lies** (v.8). Satan loves to mask his deceptions in the guise of philosophy and religion. He also loves to challenge Christianity with high-sounding humanistic ideas that may appear intelligent at first but, when exposed, they are nothing but foolish thinking.

Third, **Paul placed the responsibility of avoiding captivity on the individual believer**. "See to it that no one takes *you* captive..." While God has charged church leaders (elders) to protect us from false teaching, we must be faithful to place ourselves under their protection within the local church. How can we protect ourselves if we are not participating in a local church, exposing ourselves to sound biblical teaching and godly leadership? But, even within the church, we must be vigilant to protect ourselves from deception, which leads to the last point.

We must learn to take ideas captive, or they will take us captive. We must be diligent students of the Bible and, particularly, of the gospel. Paul challenged the Corinthians to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). In other words, we must filter everything we read, hear, or watch through what God says in Scripture.

Daily Reflection

After salvation, discipleship is key. Like the Colossians, we must know the God in whom we trust. We must become intimately acquainted with the Savior, so that our confidence cannot be shaken by the ploys of the enemy. This confidence will only come as we dig into the Scriptures and avail ourselves of the treasures of wisdom in God's Word (v.3). We must regularly teach ourselves the mystery of the gospel, so that no one will deceive us with persuasive arguments.

Are you taking every idea captive, or are you guilty of letting ideas take you captive?

The Sufficiency of Christ

September 26 – Colossians 2:9-23

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Day 268 – 97 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul was concerned that the Colossians were being taken captive by false teaching (v.8). These deceivers claimed that Christ was insufficient to save them. Thus, **Paul challenged these heresies by reminding his readers who Christ was and who they were in Him.**

First, Paul wrote, "In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form..., and He is head over all rule and authority" (v.9, 10; 1:15-17). Simply put, **Jesus is fully God and fully man.** He alone is qualified to represent and bridge the gap between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

Second, Paul wrote, **because of Christ's sufficiency, "We have been made complete"** (Col. 2:10). Since Christ is completely God, then the salvation we have in Him is completely sufficient, lacking nothing. He has canceled our debt to sin by nailing it to the cross (v.13, 14). What more can be accomplished?

Third, Paul challenged the Judaizers who required circumcision as a means of salvation. He wrote, "In Christ you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" (v.11). In the Old Testament, circumcision identified the people of God. For Christians, that symbolism of identity is baptism (v.12). While it's an external act, baptism represents an internal act by which Christ "cut out" the sinfulness of our hearts through forgiveness. **Therefore, since we have been spiritually circumcised in Christ, there is no need for the old circumcision.**

Since Christ is sufficient to save us, and our salvation is sufficient in Him, then Paul applied these truths. Since He has fully expunged our debt to sin, **He has also freed us from man-made restrictions and requirements** (v.16-23). Thus, Paul wrote, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in" man-made requirements (v.18, 19), which will never earn the approval of God. The prize refers to the life, love, and liberty we enjoy in Christ.

Judaizers and Gnostics had convinced Colossian Christians to adhere to meaningless rules regarding what they could eat, drink, and touch, what holy days to observe, where to direct their prayers, and when they could worship (v.16-18). **These types of rituals were descriptive of the old Mosaic covenant but never meant to be observed by new covenant Christians.** Most, if not all those rituals, were symbolic of aspects of Christ's ministry, which were "mere shadows of what was to come" (v.17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). They were fulfilled and, therefore, ended.

Daily Reflection

Unfortunately, Christians are still hindered by the man-made requirements of false religions. Paul challenged this falsehood, "If you have died with Christ to the principles of the world, why do you submit yourself to decrees" (Col. 2:20-22)? All man-made religions will include requirements and regulations, external works to earn the favor of God. They "may have the appearance of wisdom," Paul said, "but they are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (v.23).

No amount of self-awareness, self-discipline, self-will, or self-neglect can avert the temptations and tendencies of our sinful nature. The self is the problem. Therefore, the self cannot combat its own shortcomings. Something or someone outside of the self must help us. In other words, our fallen nature can only be overcome through the power of Christ and through His indwelling Spirit. To rely upon the discipline of the self is just another way of deifying the self.

Have you ever believed that your salvation is insufficient? What does that say about Christ?

A New Identity

September 27 – Colossians 3:1-11

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 269 – 96 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul transitioned from doctrine to practice, as he has done in other letters. So far, he has focused on the sufficiency of Christ. Next, he addressed the ramifications of such a truth. Thus, the second half of Paul's letter is a rapid-fire list of action steps, a to-do list for believers.

First, Paul challenged the Colossians to escape the muck and mire of the world by focusing only on what God desires for them (3:1, 2). Since we are followers of Christ, then we no longer follow the ways of the world. Our old selves have died with Him (v.3). We have been resurrected with Him (v.1). We are hidden in Him (v.3). We will be revealed with Him when He returns (v.4). **Our new identity is Christ. "He is our life" (v.4).** What does that look like? Paul explained.

First, **our mind is affected.** We dwell on thoughts of Christ. We begin to view the world from His perspective. We see people with His eyes. We seek Him for direction. We submit to His lordship, and we obey His words. How exactly do we "seek the things above" or "set our minds on the things above"? We read God's Word regularly. As we fill our mind with God's Word, then we fill our days doing God's will, and the ways of the world become less attractive to us. Our feet may be here on earth, but our mind and heart are in heaven.

Paul described this transformation like changing clothes. He wrote phrases like "put aside" and "lay aside the old self" and, instead, "put on the new self" (v.8-10). This process is called sanctification, a change over time, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, expressing externally what Christ has done internally.

It is impossible for believers to glorify Christ when we live like the unbelieving world. There must be a noticeable difference. It may not happen overnight, but if our conversion is genuine, and we have surrendered our life to Him, then our transformation is inevitable.

The reason why we need a transformation is because our new nature is trapped inside of our old bodies, our original sinful, selfish flesh. Therefore, these two entities conflict with one another. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, desires to glorify Christ, while our flesh simply wants to pursue sinful, selfish pleasures, those things that deserve "the wrath of God" (v.6).

However, Paul challenged the Colossians to consider themselves dead to these things (v.5). Because Christ has conquered sin on the cross and His Spirit lives within us, we too, by His power, can overcome sin's hold on our lives. Though we will never reach perfection while trapped inside our flesh, upon Christ's return or our earthly death, we will be liberated from our corrupted bodies and freed from sin forever. **With the influence of His Spirit in our heart, we will "be renewed to the image of the One who created us" (v.10).**

Daily Reflection

Finally, this incredible renewal knows no distinction. Anyone can be changed. It doesn't matter who you are (v.11). The influence of the Holy Spirit has no barriers. No person is outside of His reach. No lifestyle is outside of His transformative power. "Christ is all," Paul wrote, "and in all" (v.11).

The phrase "Christ is all" is a wonderful three-word summary of Paul's letter to the Colossians. He is sufficient! He is all we need! Furthermore, Christ is the end of all social barriers. In Christ, there is unity. He is our common bond. Individual transformation should lead to social transformation. A people transformed by Him can live in unity despite their diversity.

While you may look like the same person on the outside, you are vastly different on the inside. Your identity is hidden with Christ. Upon Christ's return, everyone will know who you really are because that which is hidden in Christ will be revealed to all "in glory" (v.4).

The Perfect Bond of Unity

September 28 – Colossians 3:12-17

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 270 – 95 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

As Paul has challenged the Colossians to live out their new identity in Christ (3:1-11), he turned to the subject of unity. **As the people of God, we should mirror the character of God. When we do, living together in peace is possible.**

Paul described the followers of Christ as “called in one body” (v.15). Because He has purchased them with the price of His Son, they are one body, with Christ as their common bond. **Thus, they are to live in unity as a demonstration of what God can do in the lives of His people.**

However, even redeemed sinners, living in close proximity, will have problems from time to time. Life is messy. Therefore, **Paul commanded the Colossians to exhibit certain qualities that would encourage unity in the body of Christ** — compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness (v.11-13). Then, he added love, peace, and thankfulness (v.14). **What an excellent recipe for people to get along.**

What we normally witness, when sinful people live or work together, are selfishness, pride, impatience, anger, resentment, spitefulness, gossip, ingratitude, and quarrels, which ultimately lead to disharmony. The qualities that Paul suggested are ideal, but they are difficult to incorporate. They are not consistent with human nature. We cannot exhibit these qualities in our flesh, but rather we must submit to God and allow His Spirit to be expressed through us.

Paul also revealed another source for these qualities — God’s Word. He wrote, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within” you (v.16). **The Holy Spirit will be more effective in the lives of those who purposefully allow “the word of Christ” to dwell within them.** Those who are daily meditating on God’s Word are breaking up the soil of their hearts and allowing God to plant seeds that will bear fruit.

What are the results of letting “the word of Christ dwell in us richly”? Paul listed four by-products. First, we will grow in *wisdom* (v.16). Then, we will be able to “*teach and admonish*” (v.16). To teach means to instruct or give direction. To admonish means to warn, to notify, to reprove with mildness, to counsel, or to caution. We cannot impart to others what we do not know or do ourselves. When we dig into God’s Word, a natural effect is that we will be equipped not only for our own spiritual walk but also to aid others in their spiritual journey.

Third, we will overflow with *thanksgiving* (v.16, 17). When we begin to understand what God has done for us, our hearts will be swollen with gratitude, so much so that our mouths will be filled with worship and praise (v.16). Finally, when we let the word of Christ dwell within us, we will *glorify* Him, “doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.17). When we learn to love God’s Word, we will learn to live God’s way.

Daily Reflection

Of the ingredients that Paul listed, the most important of them is love. He called it “the perfect bond of unity,” the best glue for people to do life together. One could place love as the foundation for the rest. Still, love for others is not a natural tendency, but a supernatural one. With God, who is love, dwelling in us, we cannot help but to love others.

Which of these qualities are you practicing? Which of them do you need to improve? Are you allowing the love of God to be expressed to those around you? **It is the best glue for unity.**

Rules for Relationships

September 29 – Colossians 3:18-4:1

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 271 – 94 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul applied the gospel to our relationships within a marriage, a family, and the workplace.

First, regarding marriage, Paul addressed wives and wrote, “Be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (v.18). In no way does Paul diminish the value or equality of women. Every person is made in the image of God and is, therefore, equal and valuable. To be subject means to follow willingly. It is a matter of choice, not coercion. In marriage, God has assigned the husband the leadership role, and when a wife humbly submits to God’s design, she glorifies Him and honors her husband.

Second, Paul addressed husbands. “Love your wives,” he wrote, “and do not be embittered against them” (v.19). Though husbands are assigned the leadership role in marriage, they are not to lord their wives but to love them, humbly, gently, considerately. Husbands are not to become bitter with them, meaning they should not treat them harshly, cruelly, or in a hurtful manner. Marriage is a two-way street. As both partners fulfill their God-given roles, then their marriage is healthier. As the husband treats his wife with unselfish kindness, the wife will be more inclined to follow his leadership. If the wife unselfishly follows her husband, then he is more inclined to lead her in a loving way.

Next, Paul addressed children and parents (v.20). Until a child leaves his home, he is to play a subordinate role in the household. This honors the order that God has established in the home. Regarding parents, Paul addressed fathers only. This is not a slight to mothers but a reminder to fathers, that they are the God-ordained leaders of the family. Their instruction and discipline should be honoring to God, firm but gentle, providing accountability without unduly irritating or angering them. Here again is a two-way street. Children who honor their parents are easier to manage, while parents who are firm but gentle are easier to obey.

Finally, Paul addressed slaves and masters. The Bible is not condoning slavery but rather speaking into the reality of the ancient world. Unfortunately, in both the Roman and Jewish cultures, there were those who were servants for one reason or another. If Paul was speaking to our culture, he would use the terms *employees* and *employers*.

To employees he instructed genuine obedience, not only when people are watching but with “sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (v.22). God is always watching. Thus, we are to do our work with all our heart, to the best of our ability with a good attitude, as if we were doing it for the Lord (v.23). In other words, the effort or excellence in which we do our work should not be dependent on whether we like our boss, whether we are being watched, or whether we are being paid well. God sees all things, and He is the one who will reward our efforts, even if no one else appreciates them (v.24, 25).

To employers, Paul instructed justice and fairness, remembering that God is watching them as well. They are to deal with their employees as they would want God to deal with them, never abusive or threatening but honoring loyalty, hard work, and excellence.

Daily Reflection

If we glorified God in all that we did, what a difference it would make in every area of life. When we honor God first in our relationships, we will naturally honor others.

How are you doing in these relationships?
Where do you need to improve?

Playing Your Part

September 30 – Colossians 4:2-18

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 272 – 93 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul closed his letter to the Colossians with some logistics, like making announcements in a worship service. However, it is no less important because it helps us piece together what was going on at the time of Paul's imprisonment and who the people were who were helping him. **The most effective ministries involve a host of faithful workers, all doing their part to advance the gospel.**

But before Paul closed his letter to the Colossians (4:7-18), he challenged them to be devoted to prayer and to seize opportunities to share Christ with outsiders. Paul never lost sight of his purpose (the gospel), and he never failed to admonish others to keep their focus as well. It is our highest calling in life to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), to be "ambassadors for Christ," so that we can be used to reconcile others with God (2 Cor. 5:20). Though our busy lives are full of all sorts of activities, they are but distractions from our primary assignment — to be "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19).

Considering this reminder, how we live our lives, how we get along with other believers, and how we deal with our relationships all have an impact on our effectiveness to share the Gospel. They can either be helpful or harmful to our testimony. It is important how we act with believers, but it is even more important how we act with unbelievers. A careless act or word could leave a lasting impression in their mind against the gospel, whereas thoughtful, purposeful acts and words could impact others positively for Christ.

Our conversations with outsiders need to be strategic. We should desire to develop relationships with unbelievers but with the goal of introducing them to Christ. Paul warned the Colossians to make sure their words were gracious, "seasoned as if with salt" (v.6). Salty words are more than kind words, encouraging words, or positive words. Salty words make

people thirsty, leading them to Christ, the Living Water (Jn. 4:9-14). Pray for opportunities (open doors, Col. 4:3), be alert, and use salty words.

Daily Reflection

Finally, Paul closed his letter with a list of people he commended to the Colossians (v.7-18). Because of space constraints, I will deal with them as a group. Clearly, Paul was not the only one with a ministry. **God called each of these individuals to do His work and, in their own way, assist the spread of the Gospel.**

Likewise, God has work for you to do, a part to play in His kingdom ministry, whether that is simply serving like Tychicus and Onesimus, enduring persecution for your faith like Aristarchus, being an encourager like Justus or a prayer warrior like Epaphras, being a light in the work force like Luke the physician, or showing hospitality like Nympha. No matter what you have done in the past, you can redeem it through Christ and glorify Him through your service.

Before Paul signed off "with his own hand" (v.18), Archippus was mentioned (v.17). While we don't know much about this man, Paul's exhortation to him is noteworthy. **"Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it"** (v.17)

What is your ministry? What part has the Lord given you to play in His kingdom work? How are you fulfilling what He's given you to do?
