

Paul's Ministry Position

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Date: 14 January 2024

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[0 : 00] All right, let's open to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1, while you're turning there, let me just give you one little word here. That oftentimes when we read the Bible, we have a tendency when we try to understand what it meant and then say, well, what does it mean for me today?

We have a tendency to put ourselves in the scriptures in one of the shoes of the characters in the story. And oftentimes we do that very badly.

For example, in the story of David and Goliath, oftentimes as we look at that story, we put ourselves in the shoes of David fighting the Goliath.

Those are the wrong shoes. Those shoes belong to the anointed of God, to the king of God, the one that God has chosen to lead his people.

Our feet ought to be in the shoes of the frightened Israelites who are being attacked by the enemy. And our great king comes and rescues us.

[1 : 03] You understand the difference? Oftentimes we think of that story as something about what we've got to do to defeat the things in our life. And the Bible never tells us to defeat the things in our lives.

It tells us that God, by Christ, has done it for us. And so we come to the same problem when we read through the New Testament, particularly through the book of Acts, in the New Testament epistles.

And today it would be tempting for us to place ourselves in the feet, or in the feet, in the shoes of Paul the Apostle. Now there's a sense in which we're going to kind of do that, but you've got to start in the right place with it.

And that may not make any sense to you right now. You're kind of going like, what are you talking about? Like the cold's gotten to you a little bit. But what I'm saying, I think you'll understand as we get into all of this.

So let's take a look then at verses 24 through 27 of Colossians chapter 1. Paul writes this. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

[2 : 12] And in my flesh I do my share on behalf of his body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.

That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to his saints, to whom God will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for giving us such a great treasure of knowledge. And it is my prayer that right now, Father, you would help us understand this.

That you would open our minds, you would open our eyes, you would help us lay aside maybe preconceived notions. And Father, you would help us not only understand exactly what this is saying, but the importance of it to our lives.

And I pray that you would help us in Christ's name. Amen. The ministry, Ligonier Ministries out of Florida, about every other year, they do a state of theology exam, exam, survey.

[3 : 42] And on this survey, they ask questions of people to see, where is theology in America today? and a lot of them are very sad because the the agreement disagreement on certain things it's so strange some of the things that people are beginning to move towards and there's two in particular that I thought were interesting for our our topic today the first one the statement says this worshipping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church let me

read it again so you can get it worshipping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement okay it's not talking about doing it beside it next to it but as a replacement for regularly attending church 67 of the people polled agreed with that statement now if you're sitting there thinking to yourself well what's wrong with that statement there's a lot wrong with that statement but one of them is that you can't replace the gathering of the church together for worship with another kind of worship those other kinds of worship should be there but not as a replacement second thing that's interesting is they say this every christian every christian has an obligation to join a local church every christian has an obligation to join a local church now i wholeheartedly agree with that statement but the survey found that 55 percent of people disagreed with that statement 55 percent disagreed with that statement one of the reasons i think this is true is because we've we've done exactly what i was talking about in the beginning we've had a tendency to place ourselves in the story of scripture without really understanding what the text was saying to the original audience and today as we read this we really need to place ourselves in the shoes of the colossians as they're listening to paul as they're hearing from paul because he's going to talk to us about his ministry position he's going to talk to us about the role that he's playing in ministry and that role that paul plays is not a role that any of us get to play but yet we benefit so immensely from that role that we need to see what he's doing so that we can understand how we ought to live how we ought to think how we ought to believe and we're going to look at this under two headings we're going to just look at paul's suffering and paul's stewardship paul's suffering and paul's stewardship so so his position can be seen by his suffering in verse 24 verse 24 we see paul talking about suffering and three things in particular we see the first is this that paul's suffering brought him joy paul's suffering brought him joy he was rejoicing because the sufferings were for the sake of god's people that's what he says i'm suffering for your sake i rejoice in this he rejoiced because he knew that christ would be formed in these people by his ministry by his suffering and that brought him joy he says something similar to that in philippians chapter 2 verse 17 where he says but even if i'm being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith i rejoice and share my joy with you all for paul to suffer for your sake was no problem for him he rejoiced in such a thing the second thing we see is that he says that his sufferings are for the colossians or you could say for the church he says he says suffering for your sake and then later in that verse he says on behalf

of his body which is the church now i just want you to think for a second what are some of the sufferings of paul what are some of the sufferings of paul see if you can think of them in your mind and then let's take a look at second Corinthians chapter 11 24 through 28 paul tells us his sufferings five times received from the jews 39 lashes three times i was beaten with rods once i was stoned three times i was shipwrecked a night and a day i've spent in the deep i have been in frequent journeys in dangers from rivers dangers from robbers dangers from my countrymen dangers from the gentiles dangers in the city dangers in the wilderness dangers on the sea dangers among false brethren i've been in labor in hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst often without food in cold and exposure apart from such external things there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches paul's suffering can be categorized under four headings he had providences in god's providence things happen in suffering to us it's things like weather it's things like sickness it's things like like those kinds of things things that don't involve other humans doing something bad to us right those there are those kinds of sufferings there's also the kinds of sufferings that i would call oppressions oppressions that's that's people doing things to us people but being being ugly to us whether it's through persecution of our faith or whether it's just people who are being sinners and sin against us then there's the responsibilities that paul has the responsibilities for other men that he's raising up in ministry for the responsibility of all the churches that he has planted and wanting to see them grow and the the weight of that responsibility and finally there is the temptations his own temptations to give up his own temptations of sin the temptation to to maybe be angry or whatever all of those things are suffering that paul's enduring and he says he's enduring it for the sake of the church and he lays out in that verse both the local church and the universal church right because there are two churches every local church is a part of the universal church and everybody who's a part of the universal church ought to be a part of a local congregation why is that well because two-thirds of the new testament epistles are written to local congregations but paul suffered here and he's he recognizes that his suffering was for this local congregation and his suffering was for the universal church the body of christ in large and let me just say this you are the body of christ as a local church you do not need another local church to

be the body of christ however there are other local churches they are also the body of christ and together as the universal church we're all the body of christ but oftentimes we kind of get these mixed up as we see certain things being commanded in scripture and we need to keep them clear for paul he was looking at both of them but then we come to this last thing and this is going to take a little bit and i hope that i i hope that i can help you get this because this was exciting to me and i am i am so thrilled to tell this to you and if you are not excited by this then that's on the lord so we'll just leave it with him but paul says all right here's here's my third point that paul's sufferings fill up christ's afflictions paul's sufferings fill up christ's afflictions the main sentence of verse 24 if you kind of take out everything and just get keep the main idea together this is the way verse 24 sounds i rejoice in my sufferings and i do my share in filling up what is lacking in christ's afflictions let me say that again i rejoice in my sufferings and i do my share in filling up what is lacking in christ's afflictions now does that last part sound weird to you okay okay great great i see i see heads bobbing that's good it should sound weird to you it's really strange filling up what's lacking in christ's afflictions okay so let's let's say this just very clearly let me tell you one thing this is not saying okay the one thing this is not saying which i think might be on your minds is this that somehow the death of jesus was not enough that somehow the death of jesus and his sufferings and his afflictions was not enough something is lacking from it in order to save us that is not what this is saying okay that is not what this is saying what is this saying well it would take a long time to explain so i'm going to tell you what it's what it means and then i'll see if i can illustrate it for you okay paul's sufferings are providing for the colossians what they need to grow that if jesus were here he would be doing himself now let me see if i can illustrate this this is this could go off the rails so just hang with me let's imagine you've you've gone to the doctor you have an issue i don't know what the issue is but you've gone to the doctor and now you have to imagine okay you have to use your imaginations with me please wake up let's use your imaginations you've gone to the doctor he's going to run some tests on you he tells you we'll get back to you in about three days so you go home and in three days time you hear this knock happens to be your doctor like i said you have to imagine so you open up the door and you see your doctor there and he looks kind of bedraggled and everything you're kind of wondering what's going on you look around you don't see a car anywhere but you see a horse and you're like that's weird well why is this horse in my front yard and the doctor looks and he says well we have the cure for you and you're like okay and he says but here's the problem the day that we tested you we knew what was wrong with you but we knew that the cure was going to require for us to take and to craft this medicine and this medicine was going to have to be it was going to have to be shaken it was going to have to be jostled it was going to have to be juggled it was going to have to go through extreme temperatures it was going to have to then be plunged into icy water and it was going to have to then sit in a cooler until it could get to a certain temperature and i had to arrive here at the right time to give it to you in order for you to be cured of what you've got so for the last few days i took off from the hospital and horse and i've been riding horseback for three days i've made it through the desert and i went through the the icy waters and plunged it in and now it's here in this cooler ready for you to take okay now that's very silly story but just replace the doctor with the apostle paul the apostle paul says i've come with the cure and i have been i've been in the deep and i have been lashed and i have been beaten and i have brought to you the cure which is jesus christ i have brought to you the message of the gospel through the difficulties of this life that's sort of kind of like what paul is saying here and and maybe maybe you understand maybe not and as we go on maybe you it'll start to coalesce for you because as we look at that and we say okay so that's what paul was doing for the church that's what he was doing for the colossians and he's saying that he's suffered all these things in order to bring this message to them and it was necessary for him to suffer to bring this message to them where is this ministry today i mean like if we say this is the apostle paul and we can't place ourselves in his shoes then what are we to do with such a truth i mean what does it mean for us that paul's sufferings provided for the colossians what they needed to grow that jesus would provide for himself if he were here i mean what good does that do us today where is the apostle paul why is it the apostle paul knocking on our doors saying to us hey listen i've got some ministry for you why isn't the apostle paul writing a letter to the christians who are in medina why isn't he writing that letter and is that the place that you and i are supposed to then put our feet and say oh we are now the apostle paul no do you not understand and maybe you do that we have with us today the ministry of the apostle paul still alive and well that ministry is in the scriptures he wrote this letter to them and it is this letter itself that is telling us that his ministry is with us in the scriptures what he wrote paul suffered on behalf of the

church the local and the universal church it was all his joy because now he has to us who are at the end of the age his letter incomplete and we get to benefit from that ministry today in other words paul the apostle spent a night and and and a day in the deep paul the apostle went through hunger and thirst so that you could read colossians that's amazing to me it's amazing to me what the lord took him through you and i beloved must take the scriptures seriously then it is not it is not a magic book it is not a magic book to just take and flop open to a verse and close your eyes and point and hope that that is something that will speak to you that's not the way it's written the colossian letter was written as a letter it says one big thing what is that you got to read you got to read the whole thing we should take god's word seriously because look what his servants did to be able to get to us i mean paul suffered to bring us words the words of god the words of life words that tell us about marriage and parenting and finances and conflict resolution tells us about men tells us about women tells us about sex tells us about work tells us about vacation tells us about the church tells us about the world tells us about government god's word tells us about everything we need to know to believe about god and everything we need to know to live pleasing to him the scriptures provide that and paul the apostle rejoiced that he suffered to give that to us that should help us take the scriptures more seriously but here's the second half of this that brings it home for us if anyone takes the scriptures if anyone takes the ministry of the apostle paul and then in turn seeks to try to share that with someone else two things are happening number one you're you're doing what's called discipling and number two you're going to suffer as well yeah paul suffered to get this to us but if you suffer if you take his word and try to give it to others you're going to suffer as well and all the sufferings in your life bring you to this place let me let me see if i can illustrate it this way it is a long road to preach every sunday it's a long road i have to make sure i'm rightly interpreting the word that's there i go back i retranslate from the original languages i check all the parallel passages i pray i check what other people have said but that's just what happens in the office because the other thing that happens between on the road from the text to sunday is that sometimes in god's providence i end up getting sick having a flat tire breaking something that i shouldn't have because i'm a klutz sometimes i suffer oppression people who are being ugly to me sometimes the weight of responsibility which is primarily for me as i look at my kids i look at my grandkids and i think about you i will give an account for every soul of first baptist church before god i will give an account and when i know there's something going on in your life i think about you a lot and i pray for you and sometimes i'm broken hearted over what i know is going on for you and the weight of that that suffering along with my own temptations to sin what i'm saying to you is that the road from text to sunday is riddled with suffering even for me and here's the here's the thing if you are a dad if you are a husband and it is your goal and your job to try to give the word of god to your children to your wife to help disciple them you are going to do it down the road of suffering there is no way that you're going to try to take and bring the word of god to your wife or to your children and on that road it's going to be like walking down the golden brick road and no problems whatsoever you're going to encounter your own temptations you're going to encounter your own opposition you're going to encounter the providence of god and the thing is is that all of that suffering is meant to be there for you and i to follow after the apostles example and say we need to rejoice in that suffering because it is this suffering that's been the road for me to get here to be able to bring the word to you if you're going to take and share the word of god with another person you are going to suffer and paul rejoiced in that suffering i'm not sure i'm not sure really if i am in the place of rejoicing sometimes in that suffering that suffering is hard and so the question is what do we need to do what do we need to do we need we need something

[23 : 54] from the lord and that's going to be in the second point in the message that paul is preaching that's where we get that something we need that something to be able to get through we need that something to be able to sort of charge through the barrier of our own issues the barrier of our own suffering the barrier of our own fears we need something to be able to go right through that barrier and that is going to be in the second point but the thing we have to do outside of that that's in the lord's hands but outside of that you and I have a responsibility to take the word of God serious fathers husbands you have a responsibility in scripture to give the word of God to your family God will hold you accountable he will hold you accountable for you giving the word of God to your family that is not meant to beat you up that's to say that's your responsibility I'm going to come with the power for that here in just a second but that's our responsibility wives mothers you're you're second in line it's your responsibility to be your sure your children and sometimes to even be able to encourage your husband with the word of God grandparents you're not done just because the kids

are out of the house you have a responsibility to your to your grandkids to your great grandkids they need to hear the word of God from you we need to make disciples and it's going to suffer and it's going to be difficult and so how do we do this we do this by looking at Paul's second position that is of a steward in verses 25 through 27 this is where we see Paul's stewardship and the first thing about his stewardship is that it was a stewardship for the word of God it was a stewardship for the word of God he says so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God now preaching has been added in the NASB but the reason is because of verse 23 and sort of what he's talking about here so they've made it easier for us to sort of understand what he's what he's saying he is talking about the preaching of the word of God and he's a steward and a steward is somebody who's who has responsible management of something he doesn't own it but it's been given to him he's he's got charge of it he now is the one who has to dispense and fully carry it out making sure to take care of this preaching of this word of God the second thing about Paul's stewardship is that it's for this mystery it's for this mystery you can see that in verse 26 and 27 right what is this mystery when you and I think of something as a mystery we think of something that's unknown something that's puzzling something that needs to be solved for Paul the word mystery is something that once was hidden that has now been revealed something that once was hidden that has now been revealed Paul says it was hidden from ages and generations but now has been made manifest that's what a mystery is it's no longer unknown to us we know what the mystery is and that Paul's using this terminology because of the false teachers because the false teachers would say we have the truth of the mystery and if you want to know it then you can pay 1995 and come join our club and we'll give you all the secrets of the ages that's what these false teachers were doing and

Paul is saying no no no the mystery is revealed and accessible to everyone you've got it right there in the pages of your scripture yeah I could walk away the Lord could take me home right now then you could still know it it's right there it's accessible to you well what is this mystery what is the message that Paul is is charged to carry out and that is that Paul's stewardship is about Christ in you the hope of glory Christ in you the hope of glory Paul's fully carrying out the preaching of the word verse 25 this word is the mystery once hidden and what exactly is this mystery it is that God willed to make known first of all it's God willed to make known something about this mystery that is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles so so this mystery has come to not just the Jews but it includes the Gentiles right

Gentiles are no longer stepchildren in the economy of God but now they're full members of the household they're no longer just service they're no longer outcasts but now they're full members of the household of God that's what he says in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 14 and 16 for he himself is our peace who's made both groups into one and broken 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 he himself might make the two into one new man establishing peace and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross having put to death the enmity in other words Gentiles who were not considered to be anything special Gentiles who were not considered to be anything that they ought to mess with the Jews thought that they were lower thought the Gentiles were lower than them now what Christ is saying because of his death upon the cross Jews and Gentiles are one new man just because you're Gentile doesn't mean the Bible's not for you it is for you every bit of it every single word of it so Paul is saying the message has been given so it brings the Gentiles in and here's the message Christ in you the hope of glory now what does that mean what does that mean should be I think fairly obvious but if not let's let's get after it

Christ in you most of the time when we talk about our salvation we talk about us being in Christ that we were in Christ when he died that we were in Christ when he was raised that we were in Christ when he was ascended when we were in Christ as he is seated upon the throne Ephesians talks about that in him in him in Christ in him in Christ but here it's Christ in you well this is the exact same thing as saying the Holy Spirit living in you it's exactly the same thing because how does Christ live in you he lives in you by the Holy Spirit by the Spirit of Christ who has come to live and dwell within you empowering you as a matter of fact it's interesting that Ephesians and Colossians are parallel books and most scholars think that Paul wrote Colossians first and then from it Ephesians a more thorough examination of the topic and one of the things about it is that the the book of Ephesians talks about the Holy Spirit a lot the book of Colossians mentions the Holy Spirit one time and we've already read it it was very at the very beginning of the book but there are a lot of parallel passages between the two books and in some of those instances where Paul in Colossians

talks about Christ Paul in Ephesians talks about the Holy Spirit and so what you get is you get this parallel between the two like in Ephesians he says be filled with the Spirit but in Colossians he says let the word of Christ richly dwell within you those are parallel to have the Holy Spirit is to have Christ in you so it's interesting Ephesians chapter 3 verses 1 through 16 is a parallel of Colossians 1 24 through probably 29 but at least through 27 and in those verses Paul's talking about this mystery that's been revealed this mystery that he's been entrusted with this mystery that brings in the Gentiles and he closes Ephesians 3 with a prayer in which he prays these words listen listen to verse 16 that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man it is Christ in you the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers is Christ in you the hope of glory the hope of the followers of Jesus is the Spirit of God comes to dwell within them and in that dwelling seals them empowers them unites them to Christ so you have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you that's how we can say to fathers it's your responsibility to share the word of God with your wife and your children it's an obligation it is a it's a duty it's something you ought to do according to God's word how are you going to do that by Christ in you the hope of glory you don't do it in your own strength you don't do it in your own power you don't grab yourself by your bootstraps and pull them up and say well you know I've read the Bible 300,000 times this week to my family no it's not that it's not a sort of brag on yourself kind of a thing it's a I want to do this for the sake of Christ I want to do this for the glory of Christ I want to do this so Christ is magnified therefore I want Christ in me the hope of glory to give me the power the strength the ability the motivation and everything to be able to do this you see that the message of the gospel and the message that Paul is preaching is way more than just get your ticket punch so you can go to heaven it is about a radical heart transformation these false teachers were telling the Colossians that what they did with your body what you do in the flesh what you do in your life doesn't matter because matter doesn't matter do you understand what I'm saying and if the Colossians were to say yeah but you know listen I'm not sure that you know my marriage is going right I'm not sure my parenting is going right I'm not sure that things are going great on the job for me if the Colossians were to complain to the false teachers and say listen I I just need to know something like how do I become a better thing they would just say listen all you got to do is just come here next week 25.99 and we will show you the secrets of the universe we'll reveal the mysteries to you we've been shown these mysteries and the only way you can get these mysteries is come to our secret meeting with our secret knowledge and our secret handshake and we will show you what you need so that you can then really live life the way you're supposed to live and what Paul is saying no no no no no no no I crawled over glass to get here to you I was beaten by the Jews to be here with you I was shipwrecked I was without food I was without water and I brought to you this message Christ in you the hope of glory it's all you need you don't need the mystery you don't need these things over here all you need is

[35 : 49] Christ that's what he's saying to them lean on Christ run to Christ and the and the and the glorious thing is this is that Paul's ministry is still here with us in the scriptures there's not some sort of little special thing you've got to do to become a better Christian you just need Christ you need the Holy Spirit you need him to empower you to live and you don't have to have any special knowledge that's secret and hidden somewhere that nobody knows about it's right there in the pages of scripture so how can Christians who are not yet fully mature in Christ ever hope to kick the sinful habits that are in your life how can you expect to respond to providences that are bad and bitter how can you expect to respond to those with grace and mercy and joy and trust in the Lord how can you fight against your temptations to sin by Christ in you the hope of glory that means that the Holy Spirit of God is strengthening and giving you power in the inner man so that you might then grow in him and it is not going to be easy and it's not going to be just a straight line of upward upward upward strength it is going to be jig-jaggity all the way but Paul's ministry is still here and the word is still there and so we take advantage of the word of God praying to the Holy Spirit please change me use the word to change me and we just stay at it day day after day after day after day after day after day do you know do you know how you eat an elephant one bite at a time this is no different I mean are there times that God by his providence and by the work of his spirit will intervene in somebody's life and take him from this sort of place and move them further down the road yeah sometimes that happens but that's not the normal way of working do I want him to work that way in my life yeah yeah I mean we hear stories all the time of somebody who was addicted to whatever and then all of a sudden God saved and radically changed they never went back you know that's great that's not

been the way that God's worked for me and that's not the normal way the normal way is one bite at a time one day at a time one scripture at a time hanging on for dear life sometimes one moment at a time you need to take advantage of the ministry that Paul left us in the written word and then you need to share that with someone else and then finally you need to support one another as you seek to share that with someone else which means you got to be involved in one another's life you got to know what somebody else sitting the other side of the building from you is doing in order to share the word of God with someone else which means you got to spend time together because the only way you can know it doing those three things help us to grow in maturity in Christ now let me just close and just say this that some of what I'm saying for some of you it's very possible that it just kind of goes right over your your head

I've tried to be as clear as I can and that could be due to me because I'm I'm a I'm a weak instrument and that's okay I'm okay with that I rejoice in that weakness because if anything happens in your life it's all God that gets the glory but some of you it could be that that doesn't make any sense to you because you've never began your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ you've never trusted him for salvation if you were to die today you don't even know where you would spend eternity and before you can really jump into all this that I've been talking about this morning that's something that you got to get right God is a holy God and he will not be trifled with but he and his great love has sent his son to take our sin and our punishment and if you will turn from your sin if you will turn and repent of your sin walk away from your sin admit that it's a violation of God's law and turn to Christ you will be saved and then you can begin to take advantage of this ministry of the Apostle Paul that he's given to us my prayer is that you would come to love what not just the Lord but the Lord and all that he says let's pray thatNING