

The Guts and Glory of Ministry

Colossians 1:24-2:5

I. The Pains of Paul's Ministry (1:24, 29; 2:1)

See 2 Cor 11:23-33 for his "bio of suffering"

2 Cor 12:15 [he will] gladly spend and be spent for [their] souls

2 Tim 4:15 [tells Timothy] take pains with these things; be absorbed in them...

Why such suffering? Why embrace such pain? (5 reasons in the passage itself)

1. Because of *compulsion* - Paul feels compulsion because of his calling (1:23, 25)

- *Acts 9:15-16 [Jesus said to Ananias] Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles... I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*
- There's been a "stewardship" (1:25) - the gospel has been "entrusted" to Paul

2. Because he's *empowered* to do this work

There's a mysterious mix of *human struggle* and *divine energy*

3. Because of the *joy* in the midst of it all - "*rejoice in my sufferings*" (1:24); "*rejoice to see*" (2:5) Philippians - joy while in prison. It's astounding how unshakably-rooted in Christ his joy was.

4. Because of the *need* - he's "*filling up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings*" (1:24)

What does that mean?

- What it doesn't mean, what it can't mean is that there's something insufficient or inadequate in Christ's sufferings and that Paul is some kind of co-redemptrix with Christ.
- We get a hint of what it could mean with how Paul uses the same exact phrase in Phil. 2:3
- So in Col 1:24 Paul means that the complete/finished redemptive work of Christ has to get to those who don't yet have it or know it. The message has to go forth, even through suffering.
 - The same holds true to the church's instruction, its gifts, its growth.
 - God has promised it; he will do it.
 - And the Col's have to hear it, receive it, and appropriate it.
 - But it has to go through a messenger - in this case, Paul.

5. Because of the Glory of the Truth

II. The Aims of Paul's Ministry (1:25-28; 2:2-5)

Paul's Ministry Aims for the Church in General

- ...to make the "Word of God fully known" (1:25)
- ...to make known a "mystery" (1:26)
- ...with all its "great riches of glory" (1:27)
- ...the mystery, which is, "**Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (1:27)
- ...to "proclaim Him" (1:28)
- ...to "warn and teach everyone" (1:28)
- ...to "present everyone mature in Christ" (1:28)

Paul's Ministry Aims for the COL's and their Neighboring Churches (= same stuff)

- ...that their "hearts may be encouraged" (2:2)
- ...that they would be "knit together in love" (2:2)
- ...to "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding" (2:2)
- ...to reach the "knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" (2:2)
 - "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3)
- ...that no one would "delude you" with falsehood (2:4)
 - (really that's another motivation for Paul - because of the danger of false teaching)
- ...that they'd be "in good order" and "firm in their faith" (2:5)

Note: how this is once again an **anecdote** to the specific **kind of false teaching** which had begun to penetrate this church. Did you notice Paul's language of "mystery"? Well, remember that the false teachers in Col were saying "we have the secret...for some - the elite of the elect - we'll tell you the secret of spirituality. They spoke of truths that were "hidden" from the general Christian public; they talked about a "glory" which was unknown and only for some.

- Paul's whole point here is that the mystery is no longer a secret. In fact, every Christian is supposed to hear what they already have in Christ. The glory of this mystery lies not in its exclusiveness but inclusiveness.

"Christ in you" (1:27)

The highest point of the gospel is not forgiveness, but union with Christ.

The goal of God's grace is not that we escape hell, but that we commune with him

We'll ultimately and finally do that in new heavens/new earth someday, but not just then - we taste of it even now.

Note: (more simply) how Word-based this all is - "...to make the Word fully know" (1:25).

Do you see how it's so *heavily tilted toward instruction, proclamation, knowledge, understanding?*

- He wants the Col's to *know, to reach, to be mature*
- He wants them to **know** of the *mystery of union with Christ* (1:26-27),
 - to **get** the *riches of full understanding* (2:2),
 - to be in *good order* and *firm in their faith* (2:5)
- He wants them to grow in their *encouragement, love, assurance, understanding, communion* with Christ,
- And he wants them to be **protected** from *delusional* teaching.

III. In Defense of Strengthening and Growth (Acts 14-20)

An ongoing debate in the church is about "the balance" between *evangelism and discipleship*

For some it's more about **love vs discipleship** OR **love vs doctrine**

For others it's about
 You see the problem even in the **names of popes** –
 Paul = truth
 John = love
 Trump card = “John Paul”
 The **pendulum** is always swinging.
 But **Paul won't let us pit one good thing against another.**

In Acts we see that **Paul's “Missionary Journeys”** include **doubling-back, “strengthening” efforts.**

Paul's Missionary Journeys are in **Acts 13-21** (Ch 13 he's sent out / Ch 21ff he's imprisoned & on trial)

- There are **all kinds of ref's** in these chap's to Paul preaching the gospel to **unbelievers.**
- But I'm not going to show you these. I suspect you already know that they're there. Those are probably the first thing, maybe the only thing, you think of when you think of Paul's mission and what Acts records him doing.
- **What you're probably less aware of** – and what I do want to **show you** – is that there are a **lot of ref's** in these chap's to Paul's **efforts to “strengthen” existing churches** - to *strengthen, teach, and disciple* those who are **already Christians.**
 14:21-23, 27-28
 15:32, 35, 36, 41
 16:5
 18:11, 23
 19:9-10
 20:1-2, 7, 11, 27, 31

This shouldn't be all that surprising:

- The **Great Commission** is an *all-encompassing work* - procl, bap, *teaching them...* (Mt 28)
- This is what Paul has been **praying** for the Col's (1:9-14) – gospel growth
- **Every letter/epistle** is mostly a “strengthening” effort.
- Paul **isn't shy** or **apologetic** about the **role of “knowledge”** or the **“mind”** in his pursuit of...
 - personal holiness
 - communion with God
 - unity in the body
- **1 Cor 14:20** ... *do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*
- When **Jesus** addressed the **church of Ephesus** in **Rev 2**, he rebuked them that they had **“lost their first love.”** But he **didn't say** that their **problem** was that they were **too theologically discerning, too doctrinally minded.** In fact, he **commended** them that they knew how to weed out false apostles, that they hated the teaching of the Nicolaitans– *“which I also hate,”* Jesus said. Yes, having lost their first love was sinful and potentially deadly, but the **problem was not doctrine or doctrinal discernment.**

- With the church at Pergamum, the one thing Jesus had **against them** was that they were **soft** on a certain **false teaching**; they weren't being **doctrinally discerning** enough..
- Same with the church at Thyatira.

Not an either/or matter – it's both/and.

And, BTW, no church or individual gets the balance just right (if you can even call it a balance). But the answer is not in a pendulum swing or demonizing a good, even necessary thing.

Part of why “strengthening” is important is the **reality** and **danger of falsehood**.

Strengthening efforts are not only *right* and *needed*, but they have the long view in mind.

- To be effective 2-3 generations from now, we need *doctrine, catechesis, instruction, etc*
- As **D.A. Carson** likes to say, “*When one generation believes and cherishes the gospel – if the next generation merely assumes the gospel, the third generation will outright deny it.*”

IV. The **Implications** for Our Ministry

Implications for DSC (corporately):

- We need to grow in our evangelistic fervor and effectiveness as a church. It is true that we probably do instruction/discipleship (even now community) better than we do witnessing/mission (local mission, personal witness).

- We should be about both the “**BROADER** and the **DEEPER**”

- **BROADER** = spread of his glory to those who haven't yet tasted and seen that he's good
- **DEEPER** = a growingly deeper perspective of God's glory – living his glory

IE **Spreading God's glory broader and deeper =**

- More knowing God's glory and more growing in God's glory
- The flame of glory spreading and the flame of God's glory hotter
- Coming to Christ and growing in Christ
- Coming to Worship and Growing in Worship
- Evangelism and discipleship
- Stretching the cords and strengthen the stakes (Is 54:2)

We witness because there are *some who are not yet worshipers (broader)*

We teach and pray and shepherd because *none of us worship like we should (deeper)*

- Because the worship of God needs to be more than just Sundays
- Because there are times when we look at sunsets and just think nice sunset
- Because we often eat to the glory of food, instead of the glory of the food-giver
- Because we often hear amazing God-truth and our hearts only leap an inch

- **As we, as a church, grow** in our personal witness, grow in a pervasive sense of our own missionary calling to our spheres of influence, and grow in seeing people converted, **we cannot** in the process **lose fervency** for “*strengthening*,” for the *one-anothers*, for *doctrine*,

for *instruction*. The pendulum cannot swing to other end. We **cannot** make “**strengthening**” the **enemy** (nor *doctrine, teaching, growth, discipleship*) – these can **never be bad words**.

- We will never say at DSC, by God’s grace, that “*we’ve learned enough – that we should do more and do better before we ever bother learning anymore.*”

- You don’t say “*I don’t need that meal; I’ve had that meal before.*”
- The **food of the Word** is like that – you need **daily food**, even if you ate of that portion before.
- You need it again because you **forget**; you need it because, even when you don’t forget, it **loses its saltiness** over time; you need it fed to you again on a **slightly different plate**, with slightly different side dishes, so that it **clicks**.
- I can’t tell you how many times people have come up to me *blown away, fascinated, moved* by something I taught...when I know I’ve taught that same passage or concept dozens of times...and I know that they’ve been at DSC for years. Yet it took a dozen times for the light to go on, for the penny to drop. That’s just the way it is.

- “Strengthening” work is never a hindrance to **witnessing** (at least, should never be).

- The preaching of the **Word of God** to the **people of God** is never in competition with our proclamation to the **lost**. It should be an impetus.
- **Love for the church** (“*knit together in love*” - 2:2) is **not** (or should not be) in **competition** with our love for the lost.

→ Yet, I hear that **false dichotomy often**, even at the best of pastors’ conferences.

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR IN WORLD MISSIONS by John Piper

(I referenced this in a sermon in 2005 as we were trying to get our global miss efforts to the next level.)

- Since then we’ve seen God bless in that area

- I bring it before you again as we’re in need of a similar awakening in our church as regards

What then should a pastor do to promote a passion among his people to see God glorified by the in-gathering of his sheep from the thousands of unreached people groups around the world?

My answer: above everything else, be the kind of person and the kind of preacher whose theme and passion is the majesty of God. No church will be able to rise to the magnificence of the missionary cause of Christ if they do not feel the magnificence of Christ himself. There will be no big world vision without a big God. There will be no passion to draw others, near or far, into the joy of our worship where there is no passionate joy in worship.

The most important thing I think pastors can do to arouse and sustain a passion for world evangelization is week in and week out to help their people see the crags and peaks and icy cliffs and snowcapped heights of God’s majestic character.

I mean that we should labor in our preaching to clear the mists and fog away from the sharp contours of the character of God. We should let him be seen in his majesty and sovereignty.

...the majestic character of God needs to be seen week in and week out not in the context of casualness and triviality and Sunday morning slapstick, but in the context of exaltation and awe and solemnity and earnestness and intensity.

How will our people ever come to feel in their bones the awful magnitude of what is at stake in the eternal destiny of the unevangelized, if our homiletical maxim is to start with a joke and keep the people entertained with anecdotes along the way. How will the people ever come to know and feel the crags and peaks and snowcapped heights of God's glory if our preaching and worship services are more like picnics in the valley than thunder on the ice face of Mt. Everest?

Implications for you (individually):

1. *Never forget, you are to grow*

- 1:25-28 and 2:2-5 is what God wants of all of us
- 2 Pet 3:18 *Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*
- Good trees are to bear good fruit
- Are you growing? Have you seen hints of growth (assuming that you feel less holy all the time if you are really growing).

2. *Put to use what you've been given*

- Make the most of what you've been, and are being, taught;
- Make the most of the resources you have at your disposal
- People have suffered and sacrificed and labored to see the church strengthened - in history and today.
- Thank God for those stewards who have directly and indirectly brought it to you.
- Use the resources around you
"To whom much is given, much is required."

3. *You've been called to ministry too*

Paul's calling was not totally unique - every Christian is called to the same kinds of things. It's not just an apostle's job (they're all dead now). It's not just the pastors' job. It's yours!

Eph 4:11-12 - *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body..."*

Every Christian is both on the receiving end and giving end of the church's strengthening, teaching work.

What are you doing to strengthen the church?

Praying for the church, and specific individuals in it

Serving?

Teaching?

Encouraging? Reproving?

Coming? (Heb 10)

Are you suffering to that end?

Is it a joy to you?

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Discussion 1: The Aims of Ministry

- *Contrast culture's view of the purpose for religion and Paul's aims*

[Culture would have us believe that religion is all about us: self-fulfillment, self-improvement, self-comfort, self-discovery, self... self... self... Review Paul's aims (1:25-28; 2:2-5) and note how outwardly focused they are. God's glory and the building up of the Church are primary. This outward focus is import for the next discussion.]

- *How has pop-church culture been influenced by this?*

[Don't spend too much time here. Just recognize the whole seeker-sensitive customer-is-king mentality stems from it. Give people what they want and they'll come.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:3-4** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers **to suit their own passions**,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

]

Discussion 2: Suffering in Ministry?

If God is loving and religion is all about us (culture's view in a nutshell), it is hard to imagine suffering being part of the picture. However, it is God's will that you suffer¹.

^{ESV} **Philippians 1:29** For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

^{ESV} **1 Peter 4:19** Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

- *How is God glorified in our suffering? (suffering in general)*

[Recall heroes of the faith. How many of them suffered to God's glory? John the Baptist, the apostles, Paul, ... Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie ten Boom, C. S. Lewis, ... Joni Eareckson Tada, Matt Chandler, Nancy Guthrie... Heidi

¹ The *Decision Making and the Will of God* class at DSC studies the will of God for your life in week 3. It is God's will that you: (be saved, be filled with the Spirit, be sanctified, be submissive, *suffer*, be thankful, be wise). Find the class notes here: <http://objectivegospel.org/training/DecisionMaking/>

Swenson, Tim Bradley, Ryan Kelly ... Of course these last few are from DSC. Recognize others, especially in your own group, that are glorifying God in their suffering. If the other names are unfamiliar, I encourage you to look them up or ask someone.]

- *Does suffering in mission (ministry) come as a surprise in light of this?*

[Rhetorical--It shouldn't. Review Ryan's discussion of v. 24 and "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"]

Discussion 3: Strengthening and Growth

Without diligent and faithful teaching to the next generation, the following pattern repeats itself: one generation embraces the gospel, the next assumes the gospel, and the next loses the gospel.

I once took a walk with Don Carson on which he remarked, to paraphrase, that "***the first generation has the Gospel, the second generation assumes the Gospel, and the third generation loses the Gospel.***"

I am concerned that too many people who understand the gospel well are lazy with it. They are compassionless. And they are not sufficiently motivated to spread it. I fear that this indictment lands on me. So pray for me and Capitol Hill Baptist Church in this regard. ²

- *How has pop-evangelism undermined the growth of the gospel?*

[The drive to "close the deal" by getting someone to "pray the prayer" has had a disastrous effect upon the Church ("drive-by evangelism"). Is this "second generation" or "third generation" methodology? (Are we assuming people know what the gospel is before "praying the prayer" or are we not even giving them the right gospel?...)]

Review what real gospel growth is: conversions--"broader" and maturity/sanctification--"deeper". Pop-evangelicalism would have us think the Great Commission is being accomplished when we get a "decision" from someone. We are called to make disciples... teaching them...]

- *Discuss the dangers of imbalances in evangelism and discipleship*

[*Evangelism only*--no depth, sure path to assumption and eventual loss of the gospel (ref. Carson quote above). *Discipleship only*--no conversions (growth in

² Dever, Mark *Church Matters* blog entry *The Great Divide? Faithfulness vs. Relevance*:
http://sites.silaspartners.com/cc/article/0,,PTID314526_CHID598014_CIID2264228,00.html

numbers) and eventual extinction. *Would faithful discipleship allow the neglect of evangelism?*]

Discussion 4: Implications for Our Ministry

- ***How can we corporately be more fervent and faithful in evangelism and discipleship?***

[We have to be both/and with respect to these. Always think “broader and deeper.” Pastors are to equip the saints for the work--Eph 4:11-12 (while the Spirit does the heavy lifting and empowers them!). Equipping consists primarily of instruction in the greatness and glory of God and his Gospel such that the saints grow to love God and the Gospel so much they can't help but share it³. Sound doctrine is critical.]

- ***How can we build one another up in personal growth (broader and deeper)?***

[You are called to be witness and it is God's will for your life that you be sanctified (Rom 12:2, 1Th 4:3)⁴. Discuss how mutual accountability & encouragement are important in both areas.]

- ***What are you doing to strengthen the Church?***
- ***Are you suffering to that end? (are you willing to?)***
- ***Is it a joy to you? (...even when you suffer?)***

³ DeYoung, Kevin (paraphrased) We are all natural evangelists. How hard is it for you to talk about what you are passionate about? (think favorite movie, sports team, restaurant, ...)

⁴ *Decision Making and the Will of God*. It is God's will that you: (be saved, be filled with the Spirit, **be sanctified**, be submissive, suffer, be thankful, be wise). See footnote 1 for reference.

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- *How is God glorified in our suffering? (suffering in general)*
- *Does suffering in mission (ministry) come as a surprise in light of this?*

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