

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29 | PAUL'S MINISTRY

VERSE 24 – BLUE

The pronoun **who** is understood when connected to the closing phrase of verse 23. Paul is the one now rejoicing in *his own sufferings*. He rejoices because it serves to **fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ**. How can Paul say that which sounds so arrogant? “What Christ lacked in suffering I have taken up for you.”

First, Paul has already said that the sufferings of Christ are foundational to reconciliation of all things (v. 20). Second, Paul claims that his suffering is **for his body's sake, which is the church**, so it is not a selfish claim. Finally, in Philippians 1:13, written during the same imprisonment, Paul says that his **bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places**, causing others to be **more bold to speak the word without fear** (Phil 1:13). Thus, while Christ's suffering brought reconciliation (the greatest of blessings), the suffering of Paul brought a spread of the grace message, by which we found salvation.

Here, **the church** is defined as Christ's body.

VERSE 25 – BLUE

Paul was **made a minister of the church** (v. 24) while the 12 Apostles have a ministry designed for **the twelve tribes of Israel** (Matt. 19:28).

Paul's ministry was **according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you**. These words are *so clear* and *so important*. The message of this verse alone would save the church from its *Evangelical Garbage*.

Allow me to paraphrase the message in several repetitive ways to help make the perfectly clear even more clear:

- God gave a dispensation to Paul.
- There is a Pauline dispensation.
- The church is under a new administration.

And yet:

- If you asked most Pastor's about a “Pauline dispensation” they would question your accuracy.
- If you claim to separate the Pauline dispensation from other dispensations, you will be considered (by many) to be in a cult.
- Most Christian teaching does not even recognize a dispensation, let-alone a Pauline dispensation.

This means that *the vast majority of Christian teaching is operating without the full word of God*.

In fact, Paul says that this dispensation was given **to fulfil the word of God**. Anyone living *without this knowledge* is not operating on the full revelation of God.

The phrase **to fulfil the word of God** is sometimes taken to mean that Paul was *the last of the Biblical writers*, thus requiring an early date for Revelation and other non-Pauline books. I do not think the grammar requires such interpretation. Rather, without Pauline revelation, we would have an incomplete revelation of God.

VERSE 26 – BLUE

What is this **dispensation...given to me**? It is **the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations**.

Though the fact of a *hidden dispensation* is repeatedly claimed by Paul, it is ignored by most teachers and preachers today. Consider Romans 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 2:7, and Ephesians 3:9.

Paul says that which had been hidden is **now made manifest to his saints**. The saints, as I contend, are the faithful of Israel (the Holy ones), and verse 27 will confirm such a definition.

It is essential to determine how and when this mystery was revealed.

- If it was in the Old Testament, then Paul's use of "now" is meaningless.
- Is this the same revelation as the revelation of the Kingdom in Matthew 13:11? Only if **the mysteries of the Kingdom** are the same as the **dispensation of the grace of God** which was given to Paul (Eph. 3:2). If this is the case, then the **Christ in you** aspect of v. 27 has to fit into the **mysteries of the Kingdom**, and somehow **Christ in you** had to be a reality prior to Calvary and Pentecost.
- It would surely coincide with the information that was **given to me** in v. 25. If Paul got it from the Gospels or the Prophets, then in what sense was it given to Paul? (See also 1 Cor 9:17, Gal 2:7, Eph. 3:2-9).

When the epistles are analyzed, it becomes clear that the revelation was given by God to Paul, then by Paul to the 12 and others.

- Galatians 1:11-12, 16-18, 22
- Galatians 2:1-2, 7-9
- 2 Peter 3:15-16

I am convinced that the knowledge of the mystery is the key to victorious Christian living. Without the understanding of the mystery, it is impossible to create any semblance of logic in Christian living.

VERSE 27 – BLUE

God desired **to make know to his saints** (v. 26) the amount of **the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles**. That is, God desires faithful Israel to understand what a rich and glorious blessing this mystery is to Gentiles. Similarly, Ephesians 1:13-14 says that the sealing of the Spirit of the gentiles (referred to with the second person plural pronoun in verse 13) is the down payment of the inheritance of the Jews (using the first-person plural pronoun in verse 14).

Note that if you take the standard non-Catholic definition of saints as *all believers*, then the word **Gentiles** becomes nonsensical and must be watered down to something like "unbelievers." But how is the mystery rich and glorious to those who know nothing about it?

The **riches** of the Pauline mystery is this: **Christ in you** which is **the hope of glory**. The ministry of Christ available both at work and **in you** is a phenomenally new thing done in the mystery. Whether **you** is taken as the Colossian church or of each believe in the Colossian church, the value of **Christ in you** is great precisely because it is **the hope of glory**.

VERSE 28 – GREEN

The change in pronoun from **you** (v. 27) to **we** (v. 28) requires that we take verse 28 as referring to Paul and Timothy alone. However, the method of **warning** and **teaching** can be applied to our lives and ministries without harm (thus the *Rightly Divided* color-coding has switched to green).

The action taken by Paul and Timothy is to **preach**. In their preaching, they are **warning** and **teaching**. This speaks to the necessity and manner of proper preaching in the local church. Biblical preaching develops men and women toward their intended perfection in Christ Jesus.

The word **warning** is from the Greek νουθετέω [noutheteo], from νοϋς [nous] (the mind) and τιθεμι [tithemi] to put or place. The idea of the word is to "put things in mental order." This is what preaching should be: a logical presentation of Biblical facts.

The word **teaching** is from the Greek διδάσκω [didasko], from which we get the English *didactic* (the science of teaching).

The **Whereunto** refers to the goal to **present every man perfect in Christ Jesus**. He doubtless did not always achieve the goal, but he would **labour, striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily**.

Notice the emphasis on *work* words. One who takes preaching as a simple, laid-back affair has forgotten the example of our preacher, Paul.

The phrase **working, which worketh in me mightily** is built on the Greek words *energeo* and *dunamis*. It could be understood as “...according to His energy, which energizes me dynamically.” Whether this was Paul’s supernatural experience alone or whether **Christ in you** (v. 27) creates this same *dynamic* in all who work in the Gospel is arguable. However, the Gospel of grace itself has a dynamic energy which is powerful, and upon such energy we draw our strength.