

COLOSSIANS 1:28-2:5 | PAUL'S MINISTRY

VERSE 1:28 - GREEN

This verse is color-coded green as it pertains directly to Paul and Timothy's ministry with the Colossians and others during their time. Were Paul present today, his actions and teachings would likely mirror those documented here, indicating its ongoing though indirect relevance to contemporary followers.

When Paul says that he and Timothy are "warning every man," he uses the word *νουθετέω* (*noutheteo*), a word derived from the Greek words *NOUS*, meaning "mind," and *TITHEMI*, meaning "to place." In essence, it means to put the mind in its place. In the context of Paul's ministry, it implies the act of instructing or warning others in order to guide their thoughts and behavior towards the teachings of Christ.

The term is sometimes used today in the context of "nouthetic counseling," a form of pastoral counseling that relies heavily on scriptures. Nouthetic counseling, also known as Biblical counseling, uses the teachings and principles found in the Bible to guide individuals towards resolution of their problems and conflicts.

In this context, "warning" and "teaching" are not separate tasks but are intertwined aspects of Paul and Timothy's ministry. These words operate as adverbs in this sentence, describing the manner in which they preach Jesus Christ. This preaching is further characterized as being done "in all wisdom," implying a deep understanding and discernment of spiritual truths.

Their ultimate goal, as stated, is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Here, the word "present" mirrors its usage in verse 22 - it denotes the act of bringing someone near to God.

Crucially, their desire is for every individual to be found "perfect in Christ Jesus." It is through union with Christ Jesus that this perfection is achieved. This perfection does not come from a thorough understanding of Paul's teachings, but rather through the transformative power of being "in Christ Jesus."

VERSE 1:29 - GREEN

In the "whereunto" reference to the preaching of verse 27, Paul's emphasis on "work" words such as "labour," "striving," "working," and "worketh" signifies his dedicated and diligent approach towards his mission. This notion of Paul's commitment to his task is further validated by his statement in 1 Corinthians 15:10, where he mentions, "I laboured more abundantly than they all." It underscores Paul's seriousness about his duty and his unrelenting efforts in preaching the grace of God through Christ Jesus.

In the context of Paul's ministry, he describes a level of energy or "dynamic energy" that seems to be beyond human capability. The wording suggests a supernatural source for this energy. In essence, Paul claims that his strenuous efforts in his ministry are fueled not by his own strength, but by the power of God working within him.

It's crucial to understand that Paul's claim is specific to his own experience and do not necessarily apply to today's preachers or ministers. Contemporary preachers can undoubtedly be energized and motivated by their message and work, but they likely don't experience the same divine or "supernatural" energy that Paul describes. This observation doesn't lessen the passion or dedication of modern preachers; it simply emphasizes the unique and extraordinary nature of Paul's ministry. Paul mentions "the signs of an apostle" that were displayed among the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:12. However, he also refers to a future time that would be characterized by "faith, hope, and charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). As a cessationist, I believe we are living in that era.

VERSE 2:1 - BLUE

This verse is marked blue, meaning it is directly applicable to us, based on the phrase "for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." Since we, living today, have obviously not seen Paul's face in the flesh, his writing here can be interpreted as directly applicable to us.

In addition, he is writing to those in Colossae and Laodicea, places where he apparently has not been. His desire is for them (and thus us) to understand the "great conflict" he had in his ministry. The term "conflict" does not signify any internal struggle on Paul's part, but rather a physical struggle to fulfill his ministry. Paul faced opponents who were doing everything they could to obstruct the progress of his ministry.

The Greek word translated "conflict" is ἀγών (agon). It's important to note that this should not be translated or understood as "agony," as the English term carries connotations that were not present in Paul's time. In its original context, the word ἀγών (agon) referred to the place where athletic games were held in the Greco-Roman world. Thus, it can be seen as a reference to a struggle or contest. If Paul were to express this idea in current language, he might have said, "You wouldn't believe the fights I've had for you." We could reference Acts 14:19, 16:22-24, and 2 Corinthians 11:25 as examples of these struggles.

VERSE 2:2 - BLUE

Paul's striving is for a twofold purpose. First, he hopes that "their hearts" - the hearts of those who have not seen him in the flesh - "might be comforted." Paul's use of the pronoun underscores his focus on those who have not met him personally, further justifying the blue color-code.

One avenue by which this comfort is realized is through their being "knit together in love." Such unity is comforting in and of itself, as it creates a sense of belonging and mutual support. This typically occurs when individuals of similar beliefs and outlooks are gathered together.

The second avenue for comfort comes from achieving a full understanding of "the mystery of God." This "mystery" is presumably the same mystery that was revealed to Paul, as mentioned in Colossians 1:27. A full understanding of this mystery not only provides intellectual satisfaction but also spiritual comfort, as it reveals the depth of God's love and His saving plan for humanity.

Paul refers to it as the "mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." This can be understood as "The mystery of God the Father and of Christ (the Messiah)." That is, the mystery is "of God" and "of Christ." However, modern translations, due to textual variants, have turned it into "God's mystery, which is Christ" (ESV). This effectively "renames" the mystery and diverts people away from the very knowledge that Paul desired them to grasp. The introduction of the variants (outside the majority text family there are dozens of variants) is used to lead students of Scripture on a "wild goose chase" away from the actual mystery. The NET Bible, a project that is deeply ingrained in modern textual criticism (with all its flaws) has this statement in their footnote on verse 2: "Even though the external support for the wording τοῦ Θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ is hardly overwhelming, it clearly best explains the rise of the other readings and should thus be regarded as authentic."¹ It is one of the weakest supports for "authentic" that could ever be written.

¹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

VERSE 2:3 - BLUE

In this verse, the phrase "in whom" is singular and thus refers to the closest antecedent, which is Christ. This means that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Christ is called "the wisdom of God," and Paul has already said in Colossians 1:19 that "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."

VERSE 2:4 - BLUE

Paul takes a moment to explain why he's going into such detail about his efforts and battles. Although some might interpret his words as boasting or self-promotion, Paul's intention is to protect the Colossians and others from being deceived. His concern is that they might be "beguiled with enticing words". The word "beguile" (παραλογίζομαι [paralogizomai]) suggests the use of seemingly logical arguments that are in fact misleading or false. The term "enticing words" uses the Greek πιθανολογία [pithanologia], which could literally be translated "pithy words," and refers to persuasive or smooth talk. Paul wants to prevent his readers from being swayed by plausible arguments that are contrary to the truth of his ministry.

Paul's experience of having his unique contributions to the Gospel denied or minimized is still common today. He is often viewed only as a messenger of the Gospel, rather than as someone who contributed a new message or perspective. This is reflected in the fact that many theologians do not recognize a distinct "Pauline" contribution to the doctrines of salvation or practical theology, such as tithing and obligation to the law, are often not specifically associated with Paul's teachings, but rather seen in a general way. This underestimation of Paul's impact leads to a less than comprehensive understanding of the New Testament and its teachings.

VERSE 2:5 - BLUE

When Paul speaks of being "absent in the flesh," he is likely referring to his physical absence, meaning he is not present in Colossae but is in another location. However, his words bear a resemblance to 2 Corinthians 5:8, where he speaks of being "absent from the body," referring to his own death. This is, of course, his current condition; no longer physically present in the world but is with Christ.

Despite being physically absent, Paul claims to be "with you in the spirit." In the Greek text, the definite article "the" is present, but it is typically interpreted in the lower case as "spirit," referring specifically to Paul's spirit. This phrase should not be interpreted metaphysically, as if suggesting some form of spiritual teleportation. Instead, it communicates that Paul's heart and mind are focused on the Colossians. He is mentally and emotionally present with them, sharing in their experiences and concerns, even while physically distant.

Paul celebrates two things about the Colossians - their "order" and their "steadfastness" of faith. The term "order" used by Paul is the same Greek term (τάξις [taxis]) he utilized in 1 Corinthians 14:40 when he asked for things to be done "decently and in order". However, this term does not imply chronological order but rather refers to social and spiritual structure. It suggests a well-arranged, disciplined, and harmonious organization, reflective of a community that is functioning effectively both socially and spiritually.

In addition to their order, Paul also commends the Colossians for their "steadfastness". The Greek word used here is στερέωμα (stereoma), which is only used in this verse in the New Testament. This term implies a strength of faith, a firmness or solidity. Interestingly, it is the word from which we derive the term "stereo" in English. However, the association of the word with sound is a modern development and should not retroactively be applied to Paul's usage. In Paul's context, it speaks to the robustness and depth of the Colossians' faith. Their faith was not superficial or fleeting, but was firm, solid, and deeply rooted.