

Complete: For the Church – Colossians 1:24-29

One of the most common questions people ask when first meeting another person is “What do you do for a living?” or some version of that question. For some of you it’s very easy and straightforward, for others it takes a little more explanation. For me it’s a pretty simple first response, “I pastor a church in Woodhaven.”

My answer gets a variety of reactions. Some people will tell me where they go to church or confess that they used to go as a child but haven’t been in a long time. By far the most common follow up question I get from people goes like this: “Ok, so I know you have church on Sundays, but what do you do the rest of the week?” Most people will apologize as they ask that question and I assure them that I'm not offended and it's a perfectly legitimate question to ask. I then go on to explain as clearly as I can what are the major contours of my weekly job.

I want you to think of our passage for today as Paul’s answer to that question. What do you do for a living? Look at the end of our passage, verse 29 with me. Paul had never met the Colossians, and in this letter, he's going to offer them some direct and clear teaching. Before he does that, he's going to give them a basic explanation of what he does. He's involved in ministry for Christ and he wants them to understand what he's all about and what he spends his time doing.

Why is this passage helpful for us? Well, you are at church this morning and many of you are members of this church and participate in ministry within it. The goal of this explanation for you is that you will understand the nuts and bolts of service and ministry within the church. Paul is an apostle and we don’t have any apostles with us this morning. However, Paul’s service for the church should shape our involvement in the church and how we understand what is happening here. I'm going to give you some roles that Paul embodied for the church and while you and I won't embody all of these, they do help us understand service in the church as a whole and your individual service. So whether you are involved in leading a small group, teaching a children’s class or on the music team, all of this shapes how you serve.

So, here's what we will see today. **4 Roles to Embody for Service to God's Church.**

1. Mediator (vv. 24-25a)

Paul starts his explanation of his service for the church in a place most of us would not go. Look at the beginning of verse 24. I don't know about you, but I don't rejoice in any suffering. I don't like it and I want to be comfortable and for things to flow along smoothly, especially in church ministry. Is Paul just an overly spiritual weirdo? No, because of the motivation that brings him to rejoice in suffering. Look at the rest of verse 24 and the first part of verse 25.

Paul makes it clear that everything he does is aimed at the health and well-being of the church. He says multiple times it is "for your sake" or "for the church" and "for you." Paul can do this because of his connection to both Christ and the church. Notice two phrases in particular: "I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" and "I became a minister according to the stewardship".

First, how can Paul say there is something lacking in Christ's afflictions? Well, the word afflictions is never used to talk about Christ's death so Paul isn't saying there's something in Christ's work on the cross that has come up short of what we need. The idea here is that Christians are connected to Christ and that the coming of Messiah brings difficulty and suffering with it because of the clash with sin and death.

Christ has ascended to the Father, and so Paul and other Christians now represent Him on earth and suffer because of Him. Paul talks about this all over his letters. 2 Tim 2:3 & 2 Cor. 4:8-10. So, Paul sees Himself as representing Christ and joined to Christ and doing the work of Christ, but he does all of this for the church. Notice the second phrase I mentioned regarding stewardship.

When I was in college a friend of mine got us some work at a very wealthy man's house that he knew. We did some yard work and other odd jobs around the house and then the guy handed me the keys to his Jaguar and asked me to take it to get it washed. For those brief and glorious moments I was a steward.

For Paul, something priceless had been placed in his hand and he was to care for it for the sake of the church. You can see in verses 24 and 25 that Paul serves as a

mediator. He represents Christ on earth by suffering because of Christ and He serves as a steward for Christ and for the sake of the church. All of us in the church have this same wonderful gift. We are go-betweens, mediators. And this is true because of what we are stewarding from Christ and for those around us.

2. Discloser (vv. 25b-28a)

Our government requires officials to file a financial disclosure regarding potential conflicts between their public duties and personal profit. The idea is to make the nation fully aware of any conflict of interest.

When I use this word “discloser” I am talking about the person who conveys the information or makes known. Paul has been given a stewardship from God for a specific purpose. Look at verse 25. That’s great, but then in verse 26 he goes on to define exactly what he’s talking about. Look there. Paul is going to disclose a mystery that has been hidden and this mystery is something fantastic. Look at the first part of verse 27. The riches of the glory of this mystery.

Paul says he has the amazing opportunity to disclose something beautiful and rich. Something that is full of glory and majesty. Here’s how one author defined a biblical mystery. *In Pauline terminology, a mystery was a truth which lay hidden in the pages of the Old Testament, and its explanation awaited another day.* Richard Melick

Paul wants to make the Word of God fully known and he defines the Word of God as God’s rich mystery. So what is this mystery that has been hidden and is now clear? Look at the end of verse 27.

It’s such a simple phrase and we get used to it, but it’s profound. Christ, the Messiah, God’s anointed Savior is now “in you” and this gives you the hope of glory.

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was called to obey God and represent God, but they kept failing at this. Do you know why they failed? Listen to Deut. 29:2-4. They needed a new heart and new mind, and this is exactly the promise of the New Covenant, and this is the mystery revealed through Christ. It is Christ in

you. You are joined to Him, and this provides new life, new desires, and a new heart.

Christ is in you and you are in Christ. This is something hidden from OT saints and now given as a gift to the church. Romans 8:10 and Galatians 2:20. Together. Relationship. Joining. Paul proclaims that you are joined to Christ because He loved you and gave Himself for you.

Disclosing this mystery means doing exactly what Paul says at the beginning of verse 28. And Paul proclaims Christ in a specific way. This brings us to our 3rd role.

3. Trainer (v. 28b)

I call this a trainer because I want you to think in terms of a coach or athletic trainer. What two things does a coach or trainer do to help you achieve success on the field or development in the gym? First, the trainer will correct you when your technique is wrong. A good coach will point out to his team when they are not following the offensive game plan. This is the word admonishing. The picture is that something is out of alignment and it must be brought back into alignment.

But a good coach doesn't always just correct. They give positive instruction and motivation. They tell you what the right technique is, and they help you to practice it. Christian ministry involves clearly articulating the gospel and correcting false beliefs about the gospel. It involves showing how to live and correcting wrong ways of life. But notice that the trainer must always operate with wisdom. Verse 28.

Wisdom in Scripture involves know-how and skill. A wise athletic trainer will not treat every person working out the same way. There's a difference between the 24-year-old dude trying to bench press twice his own weight and the 65-year-old woman trying to maintain mobility.

Bethany and I attended a debate recently regarding methodology in Christian counseling and there was a principle that was explained that I think shows us perfectly how to exercise wisdom in service in the church as we admonish and teach. One of the counselors said that in any counseling situation you have to understand 3 things to be helpful: the biblical principle, the person, and the

circumstances. If you only grasp the biblical principle you will end up bludgeoning someone with a Bible verse. You need to grasp the person and the specifics of his or her circumstances. Romans 8:28 is a fantastic encouragement, but you can't just prescribe that verse as an exercise for a person facing suffering. The principle, the person, and the circumstances have to be handled with wisdom or skill.

So, think about the overall vision of Paul's ministry we've seen so far and our participation in it. We are joined to Christ and serve as mediators on His behalf and for the church. We do this by disclosing the mystery of the gospel which is Christ in us. We proclaim Christ by admonishing and teaching in all wisdom. This is the methodology of what we do. And all of this is for a goal. Look at the rest of verse 28 and verse 29.

4. Presenter (vv. 28c-29)

I'm thinking here of the person who does the keynote speech at a conference. The one who presents. The goal of Christian service to one another and for one another is presentation. Specifically, we want to see each person in this room presented mature in Christ.

So, what does that work "mature" mean? It means whole or complete. Fully formed to resemble Christ. This is what we are always working toward as Paul says in verse 29. When does this presentation happen? Well, it happens a little bit at a time as you and I grow and change. When you respond rightly to challenges, when you love that difficult person, when you give of yourself sacrificially out of love for God and others. But this presentation ultimately reaches fulfillment in the future.

This goal of presentation has already been mentioned in Colossians. Look back to verses 21-22. God's goal is to present you before Him in the future holy, and blameless, and beyond reproach and Paul says here that he's simply adopting God's goal for his own life's work. And this is what he strives for in verse 29 and this is what God enables him to work toward.

I love the combination here of Paul's hard work and desire and him recognizing that God's power is what ultimately motivates him and enables him.

So, if Paul were to be asked “What do you do for a living?” this is how he would answer it. And the truth is this morning that even if you aren’t a pastor or elder, you are also a part of this. You serve as a mediator and a steward of God’s mystery. You have the gospel in you and you can open your mouth and disclose it to believers and unbelievers alike.

We are all a part of the training process together. We admonish one another and teach one another in wisdom with the goal that we will each stand before Christ mature and complete. We are all enabled by God’s power working in us to continue to pursue this. So, let me end with a couple of questions for you to consider.

- In what ways do I demonstrate a desire for the good of Christ’s body the church in my actions and lifestyle?
- How would I explain God’s mystery, and do I grasp it well enough to disclose it to others?
- Who is another person in my life that can give me both admonishment and teaching? Who am I close enough to provide both of this to?
- What are some ways I can grow in wisdom in my dealing with people in the church?
- What is one concrete area I need to grow in maturity and completeness right now?

Let’s pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/29/26

- Do you find it easy or difficult to answer that question, “What do you do for a living?” How do you typically answer it?
- How does Colossians 1:24-29 fit with the passages that have come before it?
- How is Paul filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ? (v. 24)
- What are some ways you can (or do give) of yourself for the sake of Christ’s church?
- What is the mystery Paul mentions twice in this passage?
- What are some ways that it matters for us that Christ is “in you”?
- Explain what it might look like to admonish a fellow believer.
- What would admonishment look like in preaching?
- Who is a person in your life that you feel can give you both admonishment and teaching?

- Explain why wisdom is so important when it comes to ministry to fellow believers.
- Explain what it means to be “mature” in Christ. Give an example of how you can tell you are growing to maturity in daily life.