

The Supremacy of Christ

Sharing the Gospel

Colossians 1:28-29

Introduction

Last week, Paul in 1:24-2:1 explained his calling and the sufferings he experiences because of it. Some aspects of Paul's ministry are unique to his calling. We know that Paul was the first missionary to take the gospel message across the Mediterranean Sea to the Western Gentile world.

But other aspects of his ministry are not unique at all. The final verses of Chapter 1 describe one of those aspects. Paul told the Colossians that the mystery (the gospel message about the coming of the Messiah) was hidden from ages and generations but now was revealed to the saints.

In verse 27, Paul writes, "To them, God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end*, I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." (Col 1:27-29 NKJV)

I want to go back and take a closer look at these verses and talk about why we are called upon to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

I. Making Disciples By Sharing the Gospel

The mission of every follower of Christ is to share the gospel with others. Some people call this the ministry of mentoring. Others call it evangelism. I like to call it "disciple-making" since that's what Jesus called it in Matthew 28:19, when he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Mat 28:19 NKJV)

Whatever terms you use to describe it, the point is that we are called to share and teach the gospel so that new believers can grow to spiritual maturity. The goal of every believer is to be complete in Christ. "Complete" does not mean moral perfection! It means to reach the intended goal by embracing your potential and developing your skills to accomplish your purpose.

Paul uses the term to refer to the process of Christians becoming spiritually mature. He tells the Ephesian believers that Jesus "gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" (Eph 4:11-13 NKJV)

Paul wants a believer to be able to view every significant area of life from God's perspective. Hebrews 5:13 says, "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb 5:13-14 NKJV)

Believers immersed in their faith in Jesus thrive on receiving God's love and giving God's love to others. 1 John 4:11 says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1Jn 4:11 NKJV)

Verse 16 says, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." (1Jn 4:16 NKJV)

Notice that Paul uses the phrase "every man" (or in today's language: "every man, every woman, and everyone else") three times in verse 28.

God wants all of His followers to grow to spiritual maturity! Of course, you can't mature as God's child until you first become God's child – and you become God's child by personally receiving Christ. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:" (Joh 1:12 NKJV)

But once you become a child of God, it is His will for you to grow into a spiritual adult. The tragedy is there are far too many Christians in our culture who have never grown up. They remain spiritually immature when people remain immature when it comes to the basics of the Christian faith. It's a tragedy, but some Christians remain spiritually immature their whole lives.

What does it take for a believer to become spiritually mature? According to Paul, it takes an intentional desire to grow in faith and the help of other Christians. Paul wants to help other believers grow in their faith! That's why he speaks of "presenting every person mature in Christ."

Christ is coming again! And when Christ returns, we are to present to Him the Christians we have helped achieve Christian maturity. We don't do this as a boast but as a crucial part of our service for Christ. We don't have to do this all on our own. Paul involved many other believers in this mission.

II. Joining Others to Share the Gospel

Disciple-making is something we all need to be involved in. Paul indicates that helping other people grow in their faith and become spiritually mature is every believer's responsibility.

Paul views disciple-making as a privilege. He uses the pronoun "I" to describe his own involvement in disciple-making. Then in verse 28, he switches to "we" to include others in the disciple-making ministry.

Paul wasn't the only one making disciples. There were many others who were evangelizing and sharing the gospel. In verse 28, he writes, "Him (Jesus) we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." (Col 1:28 NKJV)

In Chapter 3, Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col 3:16 NKJV)

Notice the similarity between these two verses. The *content* is the same ("Christ" & "the word of Christ"). The means of communication are the same ("teach and admonish/counsel with all wisdom"). And the goal is the same; growth and maturity.

Paul calls upon all of the Christians in Colossae to help "one another" toward this goal. Disciple-making is a primary goal for all Christians! Disciple-making may be the most serious failure of the American church.

Where are the devoted teachers and evangelists? The church is failing in its mission to persuade its members to teach and help other members grow towards spiritual maturity. The Barna Research Group has documented that most American evangelicals pay lip-service to this ministry, but hardly any (including pastors) actually do it. It has resulted in the profound disfigurement of most American churches. Instead of churches being like healthy families, in which all members take responsibility to help other members develop, the church has become more like perpetual day-care centers, in which a few exhausted professionals mass babysit people who remain in spiritual infancy.

Churches that have a network of faith-nurturing relationships are generally profoundly devoted to Christ and each other. That is why small groups and bible studies, and Sunday schools are so important.

Once people are attracted to the church as a safe and loving community, mature believers must teach and train new converts. Jesus did this with each of the twelve disciples. He took the time to pour His life into them. Towards the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told the disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 NKJV)

Without these kinds of discipling relationships, most believers remain isolated and far more vulnerable to temptation than those connected to other mature believers. And without a deep connection to Jesus and other believers, we are far less likely to be interested in attracting non-believers to Christ. By contrast, Christian churches in developing nations are growing exponentially because they have embraced disciple-making as their primary initiative.

We're not talking about church membership; we're talking about introducing people to Jesus and a life-changing experience with God! These churches have embraced the disciple-making ministry as biblical and normal – and wonder why western Christians don't do it.

The fact that all Christians should practice this ministry doesn't mean that all Christians must practice it exactly the same way. There is a lot of room for a personal approach. Some are better at teaching younger Christians, while others may be better at reaching the elderly. The old can help the young, and the young can help the old stay connected and interested in a growing Christian faith.

Some grow better in small study groups, while others grow through involvement in serving ministries. Some may do this as their primary ministry, while others (like myself) will do this along with many other ministries. Because of opportunity, spiritual maturity, or stage of life, some of us will have a chance to do this with many people, while others will reach out one on one. What is vitally important is that we accept this ministry as a calling from God and then ask Him to show us who to help.

We then need to take the initiative to actually do it.

III. Holy Spirit Empowered Gospel Sharing

So, how do we go about doing this? Paul gives us the most important answers in these verses.

The first thing we need to do is focus on God's Word. In every situation of life, we should ask ourselves what does the Word of God teach! Even when it comes to disciple-making, we should focus on God's Word – the Bible! What you have to share may be important but what God says is always more important.

That is what Paul means when he says, "We proclaim Christ." "We proclaim Christ" here means: "We communicate the message about Jesus to one another." Paul uses this same emphasis in Chapter 3 when he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). Paul emphasizes that all of our relationships should be saturated with biblical truth.

1Pet.2:2 says that, "as newborn babes, we should desire the pure milk of the word, that we may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2 NKJV)

Taking in God's Word is what causes us to grow up spiritually in Christ. As we grow in the knowledge of God, we must share God's word with one another. We are also to "admonish and teach" one another. The word "Teach" is *didasko*, which means that we help one another become familiar with the gospel and the Bible's teachings.

"Admonish" means to personally apply God's Word to a person's life-situations by way of counsel, warning, correction, or exhortation. "With all wisdom" doesn't

mean some abstract or theoretical biblical knowledge; it is knowing how to apply God's Word in everyday life. We accomplish this by meeting regularly with one another to read and discuss biblical truth.

You don't have to be a biblical expert to share the gospel. Just tell your story! Share with others how Christ saved and rescued you. Tell others how Jesus is at work in your life now through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Share with others what you are learning from reading the scriptures. How is the Holy Spirit revealing God's word to you? Share how the practical application of God's Word is making you a better follower of Christ.

Paul's second answer to Holy Spirit empowered sharing of the gospel requires an ongoing effort. In verse 29, Paul says, "To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." (Col 1:29 NKJV)

Paul uses the term "Labor," which was often used to describe the day-after-day, all-day work that farmers performed. The greek word for "Striving" is the word from which we get our word "agonize." Paul uses it in the sense that marathon runners would strain and strive to complete the race. To labor and strive is to give a consistent effort over a long period of time.

Spiritual maturity takes a long time to develop. It requires us to make a commitment to stick with one another over the long haul, which usually takes years. Included in this long-term effort is praying for one another. Paul makes this point later in Chapter 4 when he writes, "Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." (Col 4:12 NKJV)

Is there anyone that you pray for like that? Epaphras wanted the Colossian Christians to grow and mature in their faith, so he prayed earnestly for them.

Part of sharing the gospel is praying for one another.

It includes praying with one another, praying for encouragement during adversity, praying for the ability to truly love the people in our lives, praying for insight into God's Word, and praying for exposure of satanic lies and sinful temptations.

In our culture, we tend to be impatient and want quick fixes for everything. But spiritual maturity will never be a quick fix. Christians must develop committed relationships built around God's Word and ask God to transform us to be more like Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to share the gospel and let the life of Jesus flow through us to reach out and change others.

It's not fancy, it's not dramatic, and it's definitely not quick – but it is effective!

Conclusion

So, where do we get the energy and stamina to do this?" That's precisely why Paul ends 1:29 the way he does. His answer, "according to His power which mightily works within me." God's Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, will empower us to steadfastly and patiently help one another along the long road toward spiritual maturity.

The question is: Do you regularly ask the Holy Spirit to empower you for this purpose? Jesus told the disciples in the Gospel of Luke, "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:9-13 NKJV)

Why is it that some Christians get burned out in this disciple-making ministry, while others thrive in it year after year? Could it be that those who stay vibrant in their faith have learned to regularly ask the Holy Spirit to empower them? Those who share the gospel with others and make disciples receive the Holy Spirit's power and divine energy for their work.

Don't lose your vitality and energy as you mature and grow older. Stay on the cutting edge and share the gospel message about Jesus all the way to the end of your life! Never compromise your faith and never give up telling people about Jesus. Christ is counting on you to help others come to faith and grow in grace. You are God's hope for the world.