

Lesson Four
Colossians 1:24-29
Ministry for Christ

Paul had a God given task of spreading the gospel to the Gentile world. Through his ministry Paul experienced suffering and hardship and yet he is able to rejoice in them for Christ. No one likes to suffer, yet Christ told us that if we follow Him, we should expect affliction and suffering. When we suffer, we fellowship in Christ's suffering and we should count it a privilege as we minister and serve in His name.

Paul's desire for the believers at Colosse was to become perfect, that is, complete and mature in Christ. He revealed to them that this would mean they would suffer. He gave warning against falling prey to false philosophies and reminded them of the need for wise teaching. Although we do not have the same call to ministry that Paul did, we as believers do have the responsibility to proclaim the gospel, to know the truth and to have a concern for other believers.

Day One – Suffering in Christ

Read Colossians 1:24-25

1. The Apostle Paul was reluctant to write about himself or his ministry unless it was useful in making a point. What does Paul say characterized his life as a minister of the gospel in verse 24-25?

2. What additional details does 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 provide?

a. How does this compare to the lifestyle of some current Christian ministers and leaders?

3. Paul believed that his afflictions were purposeful. What are some of the things gained through suffering?

Romans 5:3-5

James 1:3-4

1 Peter 5:9-10

4. Our sufferings cannot complete the redemptive work of Christ, but they can help us to identify with Jesus. What do Philippians 1:29 and 1 Peter 4:12-14 say concerning this?

5. Suffering can be the result of unwise choices, the actions of others, or our own sins. However, there is purposeful suffering that we choose by voluntarily putting the needs of others above our own. How did Jesus model this type of sacrificial love and service for us in 1 John 3:16?

6. In light of what you have learned about suffering and service, personalize Jesus' command in Luke 9:23-24.

7. Paul's attitude toward suffering is echoed in a well-known acronym, JOY: Jesus first, others second, and yourself last. Next to each letter listed below, write specific actions that you can take to make this a reality in your life.

J: How can you practically make Jesus number one?

O: Who do you need to put ahead of yourself?

Y: In what ways do you need to yield in order to put yourself last?

Day Two – Steward in Christ
Read Colossians 1:25

1. Use a dictionary to define what it means to be a steward. What do you think Paul meant when he said he had received a stewardship from God in Colossians 1:25?
2. How can you relate Ephesians 2:10 to the idea of receiving a stewardship?
3. If believers took this concept seriously, what effect do you think it would have on the church? The world?

One of the best-known contemporary examples of stewardship coupled with purposeful suffering is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Caught up in Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer gave up his academic career, chose the life of a pastor and later formed an illegal church and training college for young pastors. Arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo, he constantly sought to minister to his fellow prisoners. Friends attempted to free him, but he refused – not willing to endanger the lives of others. He was hung just a few days before the Allies liberated the concentration camp at Flossenburg. Bonhoeffer could have easily lived out the war in England or the United States and no one would have faulted him. He could have justified watering down the message of the gospel to escape Hitler's wrath. But he did neither. Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that contained in the suffering of his countrymen was the suffering of God and that he could make no other choice for himself.

4. Journal your thoughts below regarding the choices that Bonhoeffer made and how you might respond if put into similar situations. Write a prayer asking for the same kind of courage.

As you end today's lesson, remember those who are publicly taking a stand for their faith and are being persecuted. Do not forget to pray for these brothers and sisters who are suffering for the sake of the gospel.

Day Three – Christ in You
Read Colossians 1:26-27

1. Many of us enjoy a good mystery. However, the New Testament word for mystery is not that kind of mystery. The Greek language defines it as that which is made known only by divine revelation. Use the following detective-type questions to unravel the mystery spoken of in verses 26-27.

- a. The words, *but now*, signal a contrast. What is it?

- b. Who “willed” for the mystery to be revealed? What does this tell you about His intent?

- c. What exactly is the mystery in the latter part of verse 27?

2. How does Ephesians 3:3-6 further explain the mystery among the Gentiles?

3. Paul states in Colossians 1:27 that Christ is in you. According to the following scriptures, what does this mean?

John 14:16-17

1 Corinthians 3:16

Galatians 2:20

- a. How should the fact that Christ is in you affect the way you think and live your life?

*“It pleases the Father that all fullness should be in Christ;
therefore, there is nothing but emptiness anywhere else.”*
William Gadsby-An Early 19th Century Minister

Day Four – Perfect in Christ
Read Colossians 1:28-29

1. The truths of the gospel were too wonderful for Paul to keep to himself. In what ways did he share his knowledge according to Colossians 1:28?

a. Do you see these same methods used in churches today? Describe the condition of those that are weak or lacking altogether.

2. To whom does Paul say that he shared the gospel?

a. What conclusion can you draw regarding the accessibility of the gospel?

b. Why is this important?

c. How should this affect your sharing of the gospel?

3. Paul was not the first one to share the gospel with the Colossians. Describe how you first heard the gospel and who told you.

4. The effect of salvation is life-changing because we become perfect or rather, complete in Christ. Do you see yourself this way? Carefully read Ephesians 5:25-27 and personalize how God sees you in Christ Jesus.

a. How does this knowledge strengthen and encourage you?

5. Has the sacrificial love of Christ Jesus so captivated your heart that it makes Him the driving force and central theme of your life? Take a moment to reflect on what you have learned in this lesson. What areas has the Holy Spirit shown you need to change?

a. Close this week's study by writing a prayer asking God to work in you mightily.
(Colossians 1:29)

