

## CHAPTER 4

### COLOSSIANS—PAUL’S MINISTRY

#### Paul’s Ministry (1:24 – 2:7)

Having exalted Christ in his prayer and then in the hymn and exhortation, and having introduced his particular place in God’s purposes for the Gentiles, Paul turns his attention to his own ministry in more detail. He is the one that God entrusted the mystery to. This mystery is not something learned from the heretical teachers; rather, it comes through Paul’s gospel, as God has revealed it to Paul. The mystery is Christ, in his corporate person, with all his glory and sufficiency; and the church as Christ’s body, with Jew and Gentile as equal partners. Paul’s ministry in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, especially those of the Lycus Valley, is a part of his duty in administering this mystery. They need no more than the gospel.

#### 1. Paul’s stewardship of the divine mystery (1:24-29)

The mystery explains Paul’s calling and ministry. In Ephesians 3 Paul defines that mystery more in detail. The Gentiles are now included as equals with the Jews in the body of Christ, the church. Yet Paul does not state that the church is separate from the OT covenants (as the dispensationalists do); he says that those covenants are still in force, and that the NT church shares in them on an equal footing with the OT church.

This was a revolutionary idea, and Paul was prepared by God to understand it and teach it to the church.

#### v. 24, Now I rejoice in (my) sufferings for you.

Paul’s sufferings (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-33) were the badge of his service for Christ (Acts 9:16; Gal 6:17; see passages listed in Frank J. Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul*, App. 17, “The Sufferings of Paul,” pp. 226-29).

Sufferings *huper humon*, “in your behalf,” for the benefit of the Gentiles (suffering even then, in prison).

#### And I fill up in my flesh the things that are lacking of the afflictions of Christ

“Fill up” indicates ministerial sufferings that are required to bring salvation to the elect; prefix *anti*, L. “supply comes from opposite quarter to the deficiency”

(Not atoning or expiatory sufferings); Christ suffered, but it is necessary that others suffer also, to complete God's purpose in the salvation of the Gentiles (B. links to corporate personality of the Isaianic Suffering Servant, 82-83). The ministerial sufferings of the saints Christ considers to be his own sufferings (Acts 9:4).

In behalf of his body, which is the church,

Paul's sufferings are "for you"; this is another way of saying the same thing.

The church is the body of Christ (v. 18); later it is included in the simple term "Christ" (2:2).

v. 25, Of which I myself have become a minister

Paul views himself as a servant, *diakonos*, of the church, in spite of his apostolic authority.

According to the administration of God which has been given to me unto you, to fulfill the word of God,

"Administration," "management," or "stewardship," *oikonomia*, literally "household law"; can refer to actual administration (Eph 1:10) or to the office of administrator (1 Cor 9:17).

"Of God," gen. of source.

"Has been given to me unto you," Paul's call as apostle to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal 2:8-9; Rom 11:13).

"Fulfill the word of God," the purpose of God in the saving of the Gentiles and incorporating them into his church; Paul had noted his progress in Rom 15:19.

v. 26, The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations

NT uses of *musterion*:

Matt 13:11 = Mark 4:11 = Luke 8:10, "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven/God"

2 Thess 2:7

1 Cor 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51

Rom 11:25; 16:25

Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3

Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19

1 Tim 3:9, 16

Rev 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7

The word refers to something hidden which is then made known. Paul uses the word more than other NT writers, especially in Ephesians and Colossians. The clearest definition is in Eph 3, where it is defined as the including of the Gentiles *as Gentiles* in the covenant people of God, the church.

“Which has been hidden,” pf. part., a part of God’s plan which was unexpected in OT times, even in early NT times. It had to be unexpressed because of the conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant. If the nation had turned to God, they would have received the promises, and the Gentiles would not have received this opportunity (cf. Rom 11).

—But now has been revealed to his saints,

Primarily through the revelations shown to Paul and to Paul’s subsequent preaching (Eph 3:2-9; 6:19).

To whom God willed to make known what was the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles,

“God willed,” God’s sovereignty in dispensing the mystery.

“Riches of the glory” = “glorious riches”; the mystery reveals God’s grace and wisdom in the way he elected the church (cf. Rom. 11:28-36).

“This mystery among the Gentiles,” the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles, enabling them to receive the promises made to Israel.

Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory;

“Christ in you,” cf. Gal 2:20.

Not only is Christ being preached “among the Gentiles,” but he is “in” the Colossians, that is, in their hearts. This is the mystery, that the Gentile Colossians can have the promised Holy Spirit in their hearts, the promised blessing of the new covenant in Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:24-27 (cf. Gal 4:19; 2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:10; Eph 3:17).

“The hope of glory”; the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was a sign of the person’s acceptance into the promised kingdom of God; thus possession of the Spirit is the guarantee of the glorious future one will enjoy in the age to come (Eph 1:13-14)

v. 28, Whom we declare

Paul and Timothy and the other Christian preachers announce what Jesus has done.

*Katangello*, to announce something already done (see article in *TDNT*).

Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we might present everyone perfect in Christ;

“Warning . . . teaching,” the participles are modal, telling how Paul and Timothy declare to the Gentiles Christ’s work. “Warning,” from *noutheto*, is the term behind “nouthetic counseling.” “Teaching” is in line with the Great Commission.

“That we might present”; the eschatological time of judgment and reward, v. 22.

“Everyone,” *panta anthropon*, written three times for emphasis; includes Jew and Gentile; *anthropos*, a term for human being, whether man or woman.

“Perfect in Christ,” final justification (as in 1 Thess 5:23; 1 Cor 13:10); the present time is one of sanctification, leading toward that goal (cf. Matt 5:48; Jas 1:4; 1 Cor 2:6); the Gnostics used the term *teleios* for those of the inner circle; Paul uses the term for all Christians.

v. 29, Unto which I also labor,

“Unto which,” the presentation of his churches to Christ in the day of judgment.

“I labor,” *kopiaio*, difficult labor and toil (Pauline references in B. 88, n. 223).

Struggling according to his working, which is working in me with power.

“Struggling,” another modal participle, from *agonizomai*, thinking of his labor, hardships, and sufferings.

“According to his working,” in proportion to God’s energy (cf. 1 Cor 15:10); *energeia* used in NT 6 times of God, 2 times of Satan.

“Working in me with power,” working includes signs (2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:19; cf. Heb 2:3-4).

In this section Paul has shown that God entrusted him with the great mystery, and that God had enabled Paul to carry out his responsibility by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. His gospel was not to be despised, it was the power of God.

## **2. Concern for the Christians of the Lycus Valley (2:1-5)**

Paul's ministry as it affects the Colossians not only is given directly by God in the revelation of the mystery, but also should commend itself to them because of Paul's obvious labor and concern for the churches of that region.

### **a. Reassurance of Paul's prayers for them (2:1-3)**

Paul begins demonstrating his concern for these churches by telling them of his prayers for them, both their intensity and their content.

#### v. 1, For I want you to know how great a struggle I have

1:29 has just explained how Paul labors and struggles to fulfill his ministry to the Gentiles; now he wants them to think about this struggle as it is specifically directed for them.

#### For you and those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

Churches in Colossae and in Laodicea; cf. 4:16.

"And as many as," includes Laodicea and Colossae; they had not seen him either. Cf. usage of expression:

Acts 4:6, Annas and Caiaphas, and as many as . . .

Rev 18:17, shipmasters and sailors, and as many as . . .

These examples of usage demonstrate that Paul had not seen the churches before, since they are included in the general group which follows.

Even though Paul had not seen these churches himself, he still had a great care and concern for them. They had been started because of his efforts while he worked in Ephesus, perhaps through the work of Epaphras.

#### v. 2, That your hearts may be encouraged,

Prayer for spiritual growth and strength.

#### Having been held together in love

Cf. 2:19 and Eph 4:16 for the body of Christ being held together.

Love is more basic to Christianity than advanced learning or technical knowledge (1 Cor 8:1; 13:2).

Even unto all riches of full assurance of understanding.

B.: “with a view to [their gaining] all the wealth of fullness of understanding.”

“Even unto” describes the goal the their hearts being encouraged.

“Of full assurance of understanding” seems to be genitive of apposition, describing the riches Paul seeks for them in his prayers.

“Full assurance,” cf. 1 Thess 1:5; Heb 6:11; 10:22.

Just as the heretics seek to lead the Colossians into new “understandings,” so Paul seeks the same for them; however, with him, the understanding sought is simply a more profound and intimate knowledge of Christ and his work for the church.

Unto the knowledge of the mystery of God, (which is) Christ.

The mystery revealed to Paul, described in 1:24-27, is the content of the knowledge that will make them “rich.”

Textual variant: “(which is) Christ,” UBS {B}; see extended discussion in Metzger, *Text of the NT*, pp. 236-38; other variants seem designed to clarify the syntax.

Christ is the mystery, especially when viewed in his corporate personality, as the head of the church.

v. 3, In whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.

“Treasures,” *thesouroi*, hidden treasure; Matt 13:44; Prov 2:4.

“Wisdom and knowledge,” common LXX combination.

“Hidden,” *apokruphoi*, term later used for Gnostic teachers.

To find out wonderful riches of God’s wisdom, see Christ in his person and work; while this knowledge is available to all believers, it is not equally sought or gained by all. Paul prays that the Colossians will attain these riches, not the false treasures of human speculation.

**b. His anxiety lest they be misled (2:4-5)**

Having revealed his prayers for their positive growth, he expresses his concern regarding the negative ideas that endanger their Christian faith and life.

v. 4, I am saying this lest someone should deceive you with persuasive speech.

“Deceive,” cheat, lead astray, carry off, by false reasoning; Dan 14:7 LXX; Jas 1:22.

“Persuasive speech,” NT *hapax*, contrast to *apodeiksis* in 1 Cor 2:4.

Note the beguiling reasoning and the subtle appeal of the heretics.

v. 5, For though I am absent even in the flesh, yet in the spirit I am with you.

*Ei* with the indicative, used as a concessive; thus the *alla* translated as “yet.”

The reason for Paul’s concern and prayer, his constant thoughts about them (cf. 1 Cor 5:3-5), especially as he hears about them from Epaphras (1:7-9).

Rejoicing and seeing your order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Their obedience brings him joy.

### **3. Maintaining the tradition of Christ (2:6-7)**

Having impressed upon the Colossians his qualifications as the one who received the doctrine of the mystery, and his genuine concern for them, Paul concludes this section about his ministry by reminding them of the authority with which his doctrine came to them. It is the official tradition, given from Christ to his apostles, and thus to the churches. To turn away from Paul’s doctrine is to turn away from Christ.

v. 6, Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,

“Therefore,” Paul’s ministry being what it is, they must receive his doctrine.

“As,” sets up a protosis.

“You have received,” *parelabete*, verb for receiving official instruction; cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1, 2; 2 Thess 3:6; 1 Cor 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9; Phil 4:9.

They received from Paul and Epaphras; Col 1:7; 2:7.

“Christ Jesus the Lord,” full title, emphasizes his all-sufficiency.

Be walking in him.

The apodosis, conduct must follow teaching.

As with “receiving [the tradition],” so “walk” takes the Jewish terminology of the way of life.

v. 7, Being rooted and being built up in him and confirmed in the faith, even as you have been taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Four modal participles, describe manner of walking in him:

- “Being rooted,” pf. pt.; here & Eph 3:17.
- “Being built up,” pres. pt., 1 Cor 3:9-14.
  - “In him,” binding element for plant and building figures.
- “Being confirmed,” pf. pt., make rigid, firm.
- “Abounding in thanksgiving,” pres. pt.; be grateful for what you have in Christ, not dissatisfied and seeking something more.
  - “In the faith, even as you have been taught,” not in teaching of heretics, but in tradition received from Paul and Epaphras.