

Colossians 1:24-2:5
(Matthew 16:24-26)
“That We May Present Everyone Mature in Christ”

Introduction

This has always seemed to me to be one of the most astonishing statements made by the apostle Paul, a statement that at first sounds arrogant to the point of blasphemy. How can anyone say that he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”? The implication seems to be that Christ’s sacrifice was somehow insufficient and that Paul needs to come along behind and improve upon it.

Of course, such an interpretation of Paul’s words would stand as a denial of everything that Paul seeks to accomplish in this letter. He is writing specifically to demonstrate the complete and utter preeminence and full sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He is arguing that we need nothing added to the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to be spiritually mature and complete. He has already written these words about Jesus Christ: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things” (1:19,20).

Paul’s point is crucial, and one too easily lost in our pleasure and entertainment driven culture: *Christ’s sacrifice is completely sufficient as a sacrifice for sin. But his sacrifice is not self-proclaiming.* It needs messengers willing to take the message to the ends of the earth, and the way that the message is carried and proclaimed will either validate or seem to invalidate the message. If there is no willingness to follow Christ, even into suffering and death, then where is the power of the gospel, where is the self-sacrificial love, where is the hope of glory that is to mark those who have been brought from death to life? Paul is intent on reminding us that people are watching our lives as well as listening to our words, and if the two do not match up, they will likely never believe the words we speak, even if those words be true.

In these verses, we see Paul’s method of ministry and his overarching goal, the reason that he was willing to lay down his life for the sake of the gospel. His method was making God’s Word known, and his goal was making God’s people mature. This is still today how God transforms lives, through the telling of the gospel in word and deed.

Body

1. Paul’s Method: Making God’s Word Known (“to make the word of God fully known” 1:25).

Paul’s life: Paul won a hearing by demonstrating and encouraging life-changing behavior that vindicated the truth of the gospel and declared it more

powerfully than words alone could ever do (“in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” 1:24).

Paul’s message: Paul then pointed away from himself to Christ by teaching life-changing truths that were to be understood and embraced (“to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints” 1:26).

2. Paul’s Goal: Making God’s People Mature (“that we may present everyone mature in Christ” 1:28).

Paul aimed at the affections: A transformed heart (“that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love” 2:2a).

Paul also aimed at the understanding: A transformed mind (“to reach all the riches of a full understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery” 2:2b).

Conclusion

Paul was passionate about this. He wrote, “For this I toil, struggling with all his [that is, Christ’s] energy that he powerfully works within me” (1:29). Paul took what was given him by God and lived life to the full. He turned the world of his day upside down, and continues to impact the world of our day these two millennia later more powerfully than has any military commander, political leader or philosopher. These letters that he wrote, often on the run, sometimes – as with this letter – written from prison, addressing specific situations that had arisen in the churches under his care, are today read reverently, studied devoutly, and taken seriously by more people, and used by the living God to transform more lives in the various and widely varied cultures of the world than any other writings.

And his method and goals are as applicable to the parent discipling her child, the teacher his student, the mature Christian the baby Christian, as they were for Paul himself. What is different in most cases is simply the absence on most of our parts of Paul’s blood-earnestness. He could say, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake” (1:24). How could he say this? Because he loved the Lord and loved people, and knew that at the end of the day, the only thing that matters is whether or not we have this: Christ in us, the hope of glory. What could possibly more glorious than giving ourselves that others might have such a hope!