

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Church of Christ Colossians 1:24-29**

We will be finishing Chapter 1 of Colossians this morning. If you recall, in the first of this series there was Paul's prayer for their spiritual growth, and then in verses 13-18 there was the person of Christ, who He was, who He is, He's the creator, so if you're going to know Christ you will realize that He is the creator. That's imperative to spiritual growth. And then to know what He has done, and to appreciate that in terms of the ministry of reconciliation. Now today we are going to look at the Church of Christ in verses 24-29.

As we look at the Church of Christ, we can think of the manifestation of Christ church here in our local body, Valley Bible Church. All of us here at some point came to our church -- I think except for the Cratons who were part of founding the church, 45 years ago or more than that. And also Dale and Lynn who were hired to come here. But all the rest of us came here because we chose this church. We were driving by or looked it up in the yellow pages or talked to a friend or something like that.

If you're like me, when you came to this church you were rather unimpressed from the outside looking in. Not that it's tremendously impressive now, I think it hasn't changed a whole lot. But when I drove by in 1981 it was a sand pile. There was no grass or anything, there was just the building. Now we have grass and a new parking lot. But the one interesting thing about our church is, as you get closer to our church you come to appreciate it even more. It doesn't look particularly distinguished from the outside but as you get to know more about it, you get to know the people here, I think you are more and more comfortable. Well you should be. I certainly am.

My personal testimony having been to numerous churches, been involved in several of them actively, having known many, many people who are involved in leadership capacity in various churches, and getting to visit them (now granted I have a very small sample but nevertheless), as I come away I'm even more thankful for the people who make up our church. Believing that among our elders and the deacons and those people who serve in various capacities, I am really thankful for the people we have here who are committed to the Lord and are seeking to serve Him with their whole heart. So having said that though, we have room to grow and develop, we can excel still more. And hopefully as we look at this passage this morning we will continue to see the ways that we can develop and mature as a fellowship in spite of where we come from today, to this point.

So verse 24 to 29 lets read them where Paul's writing Colossians 1,

***"Now rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body which is the church and filling up what is lacking in Christ afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit; and that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26that is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations: but is now been manifested to his saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: as we proclaim Him,***

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***admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ; and for this purpose I labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me."***

So he's talking about the church. And the church, certainly in my generation, hasn't really been highly esteemed, I think maybe for some good reasons. But then we haven't been a very institutional group of people, my generation. And so there's been a sense of depreciating the church. But as you look at Scripture, really the church is central to ministry, and we really need to be able to appreciate what we are doing here as a church and to do that well.

### **The Church's Challenge**

So the first thing we will look at is verse 24 and that's the challenge. The church's challenge and we are challenged in the sense of suffering. As we suffer we are challenged to suffer well. And that is the disposition we should have. Our attitude should be to rejoice in suffering. One of the benefits of moving through the Scripture systematically is we can see suffering coming up again and again. We don't just highlight some topics; we look at whatever topic comes our way. As Dale went through 1 Peter, as Dale went through James and as Dale will be going through John we will be seeing suffering as a part of the church. It just is, we cannot avoid it, it's even promised to us.

But when suffering comes our way what should our response be? It should be to rejoice and we are told this over and over again. Paul exhibits that; he rejoices in suffering. Why is this? Why is it he should exhibit rejoicing and that you should be exhibiting rejoicing whenever suffering comes your way? Granted we don't suffer as much as the early church did or maybe as much as some people do. But in every people of every time we are told suffering will happen. We will in some sense suffer some degree of persecution.

So if this happens what should be our attitude? Rejoicing, because we can look for how this benefits us. We can see that suffering brings about endurance, brings about spiritual growth. And because we long for it to know Christ better to enjoy in the fellowship of His suffering and to mature through this, we can be rejoicing. Sort of like my third grade daughter is studying division now. Long division. And if you are a third grader, you can think this is horrible, who wants to do this? But it brings about a good thing as we move through this, so now we can learn to use our calculators better! Well, our suffering produces maybe not appreciated growth but it truly brings about something that is long lasting, a joy that can be enduring throughout difficulties.

Well that is our disposition, so what's our contribution. Our contribution should be to share in the suffering of Christ. Now verse 24 is an interesting verse. How is this sense that we share in the suffering? Now Paul writes it this way. "***In my flesh I do my share on behalf of his body which is the church,***" we should do our share, "***in filling up what is lacking in Christ afflictions.***"

Now this is really interesting. In what sense are Christ's afflictions lacking? And what does this mean? There is, among Catholicism, a belief in purgatory, where your afflictions in purgatory are removing sin from you and you can then go into heaven.

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Within Catholicism there are a lot of people who really do not think a lot about doctrine. Most Catholics are not doctrinally grounded. And coming from that background and knowing a lot of Catholic friends, this is quite evident. But there really is an element within Catholicism that is seeking to defend Catholic doctrine from the Scripture.

And I will give you an illustration of this in looking at this very passage, Colossians 1:24. This comes from the Catholic Information Network, an element within this part of Catholicism that wants to support it from the Scripture. A fellow named David writes in and says, "If we are to believe in purgatory then some other questions come to mind. If we die and more sin has to be done away with, then why did Jesus die on the cross? 'Behold' he quotes, 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' Remember the old song, 'what can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus, what can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus?' Jesus, our high priest, made atonement between God and man. All we need to do is to ask him to forgive us our sin. No purgatory even comes into it. His word says we are saved by grace, which is the gift of God."

And the response by a fellow named Father Mateo says this, "Dear David, Of course in Christ all is forgiven. He purchased our salvation with His sacrificial death upon the cross."

And if you are familiar with Catholic writing this is very common. If they stop there everything is wonderful. But they don't stop there, they keep going on. So in a sense they say this and if you just want to pick out that you can say well this is what they said. But that's not all of what they say, they say more.

Father Mateo continues, "He purchased our salvation with His sacrificial death upon the cross but we have our part to play in union with and in subordination to Christ. And our part is offering fitting atonement in Christ for our sins so to remove with His cooperation the last vestiges of our salvation and sin. When these are all gone we can enter heaven. Until then if we die before atonement is complete we will suffer in purgatory. Some say, 'but atonement is already complete, Christ completed it.' Of course He did, radically and in principle. But in you and me the application is not complete. So Saint Paul said, '**in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.**' What is lacking was that Paul should share in the afflictions of Christ both for himself and vicariously for others so that none should be cast away."

So this is their view of this verse, what's lacking according to this is Christ's afflictions are need to be added to by our afflictions, our suffering, so that the afflictions can completely atone for sin. Now is that what this verse teaches? Well if it did it would be quite in contrast to multitudes and multitudes of Scripture that indeed teach that the blood of Christ takes away sin. In and of itself there is one death for sin, Jesus Christ. And Paul even talks about that a little earlier in the passage.

So what does this teach? Well, first we have to look at afflictions. Christ afflictions here refer to the sufferings of the church, the body of Christ. When he's talking about filling up Christ afflictions, he's talking about the afflictions that are coming on to the church. They are called Christ afflictions because the church is the body of Christ.

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If you recall it wasn't that long ago where Dale taught in Philippians 3:10. In Philippians 3:10, there's a phrase *the fellowship of His suffering* and that phrase was taught well, that this is the sufferings of the church that are Christ sufferings, and Dale looked to Acts 9:4 which really shows this well. This is where Paul has Jesus come to him in a vision, in his conversion. Jesus' words to Paul are this, "**Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?**" In persecuting "Me" because Paul was persecuting the church. Jesus wasn't physically around to be persecuted, but He was around in dwelling in the church so when Paul was persecuting the church, Paul was persecuting Christ. Jesus can then say, "why are you persecuting Me?" when Paul was persecuting the church. So Christ's afflictions refer to the sufferings of the church. So when Paul writes, "**I do my share on behalf of his body which is the church and filling up what is lacking in Christ afflictions;**" Christ afflictions are to the church, the suffering that the church is suffering.

The word "affliction" is used in the New Testament exclusively to mean the trials of life. It is never used to mean the death of Christ, only the trials of life. It's not used in terms of the death of Christ for the atonement of sin. So as we go through life and we suffer, we are afflicted and those afflictions are indeed Christ's afflictions as we are part of the body of Christ.

The context here is service not salvation. The context is that Paul is seeking to do his share on behalf of his body to serve them, to build them up, to mature them to be complete in Christ (1:28-29). Not to atone for their sins. That had already been done. The context is his service of the church. What is lacking is not in regard to the atonement of our sins. That is not lacking. Christ death atones fully for our sins. What's lacking is in regards to the fulfillment of the ministry of the church. As the church is ministering what is lacking. It's that there's suffering that is coming to the church that has been promised to the church. And these sufferings are being filled up and Paul is doing his share in taking the sufferings that are Christ afflictions to the church.

Hopefully, you're doing your share in taking those afflictions so that His afflictions can be complete as the suffering of the church continues onward. Hopefully you're not shirking your responsibilities, your opportunities to share in the sufferings and pass those off to other people who will suffer. That you're not saying "well this is a little more than what I want, I think I will move that away," because those sufferings are coming. So we're going to be ministering and we're going to be suffering and they are coming and the question really is, whose going to be suffering in addition to Christ? It will be somebody. So hopefully you'll do your share as Paul did his share.

### **The Church's Character**

Next we are going to look at the church's character. The church's character, verses 25-27. Paul writes, "***of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit; and that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations: but is now been manifested to his saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***"

So the first thing to note is that the church here is developing, that comes from verse 25: "***Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit; and that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.***"

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Fully carry out. This phrase "fully carry out" has a sense of doing something to its completion. It needed to be filled, completed, fully carried out. So the ministry of the word of God is going forward and Paul is seeking to fully carry out this ministry. And it continues onward to our day, that the word of God is needing to be fully carried out and we are serving in that way. The church is developing in its ministry.

I think Valley Bible Church is developing in its ministry, to fully carry out the word of God. I think we are doing better than we used to. We were doing well before; I think we have stronger ministries today than when I first came here. We have softer chairs with nicer colors that are not green and blue; we have green grass to play on instead of dirt around here. We have a nicer parking lot. Though much more important than that is the people that I think are maturing and stronger and we have better ministries as a result of that. Hopefully, you personally are continuing to carry out your ministry in a developing and stronger way than you did before, with more wisdom.

So as the church develops the church is also, another characteristic, distinct. Verse 26 ***"that is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations: but is now been manifested to his saints."***

Let me try to explain this. The church is distinct because it has been hidden and is now revealed. In the New Testament, the term "mystery" means not a puzzle to be figured out but rather it is something that is hidden, not fully revealed until the time when God reveals it. And that's something that really couldn't be known. Like when I grew up, I read detective stories and mysteries, whodunnits, that sort of thing. But those could be figured out. This is a mystery that could not be known but is revealed. So what is it that is not known but is now revealed? Well, it's not that Christ would come and suffer for sin; He was prophesized in the Old Testament. It's not that this would be the mystery among the Gentiles. The Gentiles were known, that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles.

But here is what the mystery is, verse 27, ***"to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*** This is the mystery. That it was never revealed until the New Testament, that Christ was coming to be in us and dwell in us. That His dwelling within us is nothing like His dwelling in the nation of Israel, where they saw God dwelling in the temple and before the temple, God dwelled in the tabernacle. But now God dwells among us.

And here it's in the plural, like 1 Corinthians 3:16 is in the plural as well, God dwells in the church. He also dwells within each individual believer, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19. That Christ is dwelling within us, this is not revealed until the New Testament. So as Christ is dwelling in us we are distinct and that's why we are called the church. The church wasn't established until Acts 2, in the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down to dwell in the church. Before then, with the nation of Israel, Christ did not dwell in them in the same way He dwells in us. There's different ways that God worked with the nation of Israel but now He is working with the church so that this mystery among the Gentiles can be fully known, the riches and the glory. Things are different.

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And this is one way churches need to be more mature, to be able to see that distinction and not move things that were part of the nation of Israel and intended for the nation of Israel and stick them in the church. Some people don't see the distinction between the church and Israel and they need to, because the church age was a mystery not revealed until the New Testament.

Besides being distinct the church is also diverse. The church is distinct from Israel and the church is diverse because this mystery is among the Gentiles. What the Gentiles mean is anybody that is not a Jew. That word actually means a "people." The people meaning all these peoples, all these ethnic groups through out the world. These peoples include people from every language group, every tribal group, all nations, they will be represented in the kingdom of God in the book of Revelation, and it tells us that. So this mystery is coming to all these different people. So a healthy church is participating in doing this, to do part of their share in bringing the message to all the people. And we are doing that and I think we are doing that increasingly better as the years go on.

But it's also that a church should, I believe, not be limited to one ethnic group or one social economic group. I think it's really to be more broader, the Gentiles. Now how does a church become broader in ministering to different ethnic groups? Well, we could speak different languages but that would be rather difficult, logistically for me, to communicate in different languages. However, I think that focusing on God's word does it. If the ministry is really founded in the word of God, then it is appealing to everyone. All types of people are drawn to the word of God by the Lord Himself rather than some cultural techniques that we can use to draw people in that might be attracted to one economic group or one sociological group. To focus on God's word.

But the point here is that believing Jews and believing Gentiles are now formed into one entity, the body of Christ, the church. That teaching is more fully developed in Paul's writing to the Ephesians chapter 2:11-16. But that's what is being joined together here.

And finally the church is the dwelling of God. He is dwelling in the church. Now there is a kind of play on words between the word "among" and the word "in" here. It is God's will to make Himself known among the Gentiles by dwelling in believers. He's dwelling in us so that we can make Him known among the Gentiles. If we separate ourselves out, not in holiness, but in physical locality and we are only relating to ourselves, then the Gentiles will not be able to know what the riches of the glory of this mystery is. God's intent for the nation of Israel was for them to be physically set apart in one place. But now things have changed in the church age, we are to have Christ in us going among the Gentiles so that we can be ambassadors for Christ, ministers of reconciliation according to 2 Corinthians 5:20. We can be among them to minister to them rather than separate ourselves out from them. The mystery is among the Gentiles.

### **The Church's Commission**

We will continue on, the third thing we will look at, not just the church's challenge in suffering, the church's character in being these things, diverse, distinct, developing, but also the church's commission.

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The church's commission is in verse 28-29. If you would like a memory verse this is a great one for you. I think this really capsulizes what our commission is as a church. ***"as we proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ; 29and for this purpose I labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me."***

As we look at this, what is the charge we are being given? The charge here, the main verb here, is the word "proclaim." But with the word "proclaim," there are a couple of other key words that might be overlooked. The first word that can be overlooked is "we." And the second word that can be overlooked is "every." There are two key words, "we" and "every."

"Every" might be more noticeable to you because it does show up three times. It shows up in admonishing every man, teaching every man and presenting every man complete in Christ. That's one way to emphasize something, to repeat it and it is repeated three times, every is a key word.

The other key word is not so clearly seen and it's the word "we." It's emphasized. If you remember from last week, it is because of the word order, where it's put. It's put in the front of the sentence. We can't do this in English. We'd mess the sentence all up, it would make no sense. But in Greek you can do this and if it is put in the front of the sentence to emphasize the word, it's emphatic.

It's also contrasted to the previous verses that we read earlier. Remember in verse 24 to verse 27 Paul uses the word "I" throughout those verses? But now he shifts to the word we and making this plural.

So why is this "we" so important? This we is so important because there is no way that one person is going to minister to every man, teach every man, present every man. That is impossible, it needs a "we" not an "I." So we are essential in fulfilling this charge, the charge being proclaiming Christ. This charge that we've been given requires us, all of us, participating in this charge of proclaiming Him.

The word "proclaim" is an official term. It's a term making an official proclamation like being ambassadors of Christ, ambassadors of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:20. We have an official capacity to proclaim Christ to the world. Everybody, every man, that's our charge.

Notice, it's not proclaim things about Christ, it's proclaiming Christ Himself, the focus is Christ, proclaiming Him.

Now how do we do this? I tried to come up with an illustration to show how proclamation happens. First, the correction is to admonish and teach and here's where my illustration comes in with admonish and teach. Proclaim is accomplished through admonishing and teaching. Admonishing and teaching are the means to the end. Admonishing is, as some translations will put it, counsel or correct. We admonish people in bringing correction to them. It is kind of a given that each person is not completely together. There are things that need to be corrected and we admonish people in order to correct. Some people don't want admonishment. Some churches don't want admonishment. But that is not the fulfillment of this charge. We need admonishment in order to grow.

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And I'll make a shameless plug for our Growth Group ministry because I think that is the best context for this admonishment. Because let's face it, you are only going to be admonished in a very distant capacity with a service like this. But in terms of personal life, I think we need to be rubbing up against people more personally so they can see our life and help us in that way. And conversely so we can help them as well because we need to be participating in them also. We need to be proclaiming Christ, admonishing. So I realize that not many people are looking for admonishment, but we cannot have growth apart from admonishment. This is part of the commission that we've been given, to be admonishing. Counseling in other words. Realize that we are deficient and we need to move forward in our spiritual life.

We also need teaching. This is a two-prong thing. Teaching. Instruction. It is a given here that we haven't learned everything that needs to be learned. We need to be instructed. Rather than just being told what we already know, or just having our preconceptions validated. We don't want a church where you just come and have everything you always believed validated for you, because then you are not learning. We need to be taught, everybody needs to be taught. Each individual person, no one is excluded. Every person is the emphasis here. You, me, don't opt out of it, you are participating in this charge and you need to position yourself so that you can enjoy the admonishment and teaching and be able to give the admonishment and teaching. You can participate in it on a personal, relational level.

Now what else is involved in this? Admonishing, teaching every man. Well, there's the communication, there's a clarification, with all wisdom. I tried to think of some way to put this in the illustration, this is all encompassing, this is one reason when admonishment is maybe not well thought of because maybe too many people, when they admonish, they are doing it with a holier than Thou attitude, sort of building themselves up by putting someone else down. Admonishment is for the purpose of edifying and we need more of that, admonishing for the purpose of building up and edifying. But we need wisdom, we need to be wise, we need to be learning the Scriptures so we can grow in wisdom and as we apply the Scripture we will grow in wisdom. And as we wisely grow and mature, our ministry will be able to admonish better and will be able to teach better. So hopefully my teaching is better now than it used to be and I hope it is going to get even better because hopefully I'm learning with all wisdom to communicate so that you are not quite so bored with this. Wisdom, we need wisdom.

What's the culmination of this ministry? The end of this ministry is to be complete in Christ. That word "complete" I think is best translated as maturity. We need maturing in Christ. You can translate this "perfect," you can translate this "complete," or you can translate this "mature." I think the thing that best fits with what we are looking for each person, not overlooking anyone, is for them to be made complete, that they can be maturing in Christ. They can be fulfilling the God-given potential that God has designed them to be. That doesn't mean we are all doing the same thing, or we're all acting the same way. We all have different abilities and gifts and ministries, but in those abilities, gifts and ministries that God has given to us we need to be maturing to the potential that God has designed for us. Complete, every man, not opting anybody out.

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Now we look at Paul himself. Now Paul said, "imitate me as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). He writes, ***and for this purpose also I labor striving according to his power which mightily works within me.*** He's laboring, striving; this is a commitment that we must have, to labor for Christ. This is what Paul did; this is the example we must follow. The purpose He gave for Himself was He labored and strived according to God's power. That word labor is "work, toil, tireless effort," so when we serve it's tireless effort, if we are to follow Paul's example. And the word "striving" means to agonize, the Greek word striving is where we get our word agonize. We agonize because there's difficulty that comes from laboring. So I would hope each one here is not looking to shirk from laboring. And not looking at how difficult this is but having that purpose to strive and to labor to present every man complete in Christ.

Let me give you a personal illustration, this is almost a little embarrassing but I will give it to you anyway, last week many, many, many people, I think in trying to help me minister and try to relate to me, would say, "boy, four services on a Sunday is a lot." My attitude was, there are a lot of people doing a lot more than this. I couldn't help but think of our troops over in Iraq and the sandstorms and all the effort that they are having to go through, and thinking boy I have it pretty nice here, I'm showered, fed well, not having to be shot at. I'm very comfortable; I think I can hack my four services. In fact, to be honest it's more effort preparing for it rather than actually doing it, I might as well do it one more time since I've already prepared for it.

So it's not really that huge of an effort. But if I'm rather self-absorbed, what kind of an attitude can I have? "Why nobody else has to do this," or "you know I'm kind of getting tired, I think I need a break" or "I'm never doing this again." You know, all these kinds of fleshly things that can have the look of what I'm doing, that other people aren't doing as much as I'm doing and feeling sorry for ourselves and looking to shift this over to someone else. Well if we have this attitude, the church is not going to be achieving its potential and maturing. We have to have the attitude of this is what Paul did, this is what Jesus has done, and I need to give it everything I have. And as I give it everything I have, I strive and I labor, I'm not alone; It's according to His power which mightily works within me, which mightily works within you, so we are not just left to hammer this out in our own strength, it is God's power working within us.

It is a wonderful contrast. His purpose was to labor, striving, but it was according to God's power working within him and working within us. So we know we are not going to get halfway there and die because God is faithful and His power will work to see us through and give us the ability to persevere. What a wonderful thing. Let's do that, let's labor so that we can present everyman complete in Christ.

Let's pray. Lord we do thank You for Your work among us. You give us the ability to understand You and then to respond to You. And serving You, we pray that we can be doing our share in suffering, doing our share in developing the church to its full potential and doing our share as we proclaim You, admonishing everyone, teaching everyone. We pray that we would not shirk away from our responsibility, that we could be participating together so that this church can be all of what you designed it to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.