

# Significance

*Colossians 1:24-27*

1. Our Creator makes His presence felt in the world today through the Church.
2. Our Creator's work today is the church, churches, and their work of utilizing immature people to bring people to faith and to maturity.
3. The Church is an extension of His very being. It's health and strength He entrusts to us as our life's work. It deserves from us whatever He deserves.
4. His unfinished work requires my suffering, just as His finished work required His.
5. Though tough, the significance of this work brings joy (plus, I'm working with Him!).
6. This requires my body as it did His. Its not enough to affirm and cheer!
7. We have an individualized stewardship with regard to the Church, which means discovery, privilege, accountability and reward.

## Pastor Bob Fox Personal Notes on Colossians 1

**1:24—“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the Church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.**

If one is to help move along the salvation process in the life of others, and if one is to help bring maturity to local Churches, it is certain that this will involve suffering on their part. The suffering could be physical in terms of persecution, sickness, weariness and various stress-related maladies. It could be emotional, due to its relational nature and all the accompanying misunderstandings, concerns, wounds and unresolved traumas. But it is certain that the work requires suffering and sacrifice by its very nature. It is mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical work rolled into one. The mental aspect of the work involves balancing and maintaining many vexing theological tensions that are only so maintained by faith. Because it is spiritual work, it is unseen and subjective and results are often intangible. There is an invisible enemy and invisible obstacles. Because the work is emotional it is characterized by wide swings within moments of each other and so is unpredictable. It is physical because it requires being places at certain times and it takes a toll on the body. It results in sleepless nights, is never done, and must be engaged regardless of how the body feels.

Paul rejoiced in such suffering. He likely did so as an endurance-athlete “enjoys” an event. There’s just something that feels good about the push, though it may not feel good to the senses in the moment. He rejoiced in his spirit because His Spirit witnessed within him that this was all right and good and the absolute will of God. That is the greatest of feelings. It is produced by the combination of faith and obedience.

When we think of Christ’s sufferings our minds go first to His death and rightfully so. Without His death the rest of His life would have had less impact on us. But His entire life involved sacrifice--spiritual, emotional, mental and physical sufferings. There was the mental work of wrestling with the written word and learning His own identity and calling from the Old Testament writings. There was the emotional load of the resistance of people He loved, broken relationships, being maligned and misrepresented. There was the spiritual work of resisting temptation, knowing the leading of the Father, choosing people, discerning hearts, and whole nights of prayer. There was the physical work of long days and sleepless nights. This was His life. All the stress of it was visible in Him before the actual events that were involved in His torture and death. These sufferings of His life were essential to His work of revealing the Father to us.

The work of justifying us before God was essential to us having relationship with God. For that work to be done He had to die. That is the work He declared finished, and the veil of the temple being torn was the visible sign that work was complete.

The work of sanctifying us and bringing all of His family to maturity though provided for, is not finished. That is the work He partners with us in. His sufferings were essential and foundational to that work. Without the baptism of the Spirit we could not be sanctified. The Old Covenant proved that. Without the fuller revelation of God, the information disclosed through the teachings of Christ and the actions of Christ, we would not have the truth that sets us free (Jn 8:31-32). He finished the work of revelation through His apostles of which Paul was one. He is presently finishing His work of bringing about the gathering and maturing of His family through His family

(Eph 4:1-16). This is the sense in which our sufferings in behalf of His family add to His and bring to completion His work. His sufferings lacked in the sense that they did not propagate the truth to all of the world, they did not establish local Churches, they did not complete all He wishes to do on the earth and in the earth's people. Our sufferings are added to those of Christ as He completes His work through us by His Spirit.

There is a large sense in which the sufferings of Christ are sufficient. There is nothing we need add to them to bring absolution to our guilt for our sin. There is nothing we need to add to them to be embraced by Him as His children once we have believed. There is nothing we need to add to them once we have believed in Him to receive His Holy Spirit. But His work of bringing others to such faith involves us, and it involves our own sacrifice and suffering for which we will be abundantly rewarded.

**1:25—“Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God.*”**

There are two terms added in this rendering by the NASB. The first is added to clarify that the health of the Church, the body of Christ, was that which Paul was to focus his efforts on. The second term added by the NASB seeks to bring additional clarity as to what it was that Paul was to fully carry out. And so the translators added “the preaching of” to the term the word of God. This has the effect of saying that the proclamation of the word of God was the specific task Paul was to fully carry out. There is an alternate way of understanding this latter phrase that may be better, which will be addressed below.

These thoughts of Paul follow after he has referred the readers to his own sufferings that he has joyously endured that have been added to those of Jesus in behalf of Jesus' family. They give us great perspective on the issue of life calling and purpose and on our own quest for significance.

Paul suffered with joy because this course of action that led to suffering for him personally was of benefit to the body of Christ. The phrase “for your benefit” occurs in the middle of this verse, and is central to its thought. Our life purpose and our call relates always to benefit for the Church. Whenever we ponder our own purpose and calling, the benefit of the body of Christ should be the primary factor we find ourselves pondering. It is a fundamental error to base our perspective on our own purpose and calling in life on what will benefit us, feel good to us, or fill up our lives.

We should learn much from this statement by Paul because he found what he had been made for and called to do by God by direct interaction with Jesus Christ. It was not a subjective process as ours is, that could be warped by Paul's own desires or the subtle influences of guilt or some unperceived emotional need in him. That is the path he WAS on. Then Jesus Himself interrupted his course. There was no subtle leading, no still small voice. There was dramatic intervention, a blinding light and a booming voice. If anyone has ever known with certainty what God wanted them to do with their lives, it was Paul. The design and purpose of God for Paul's life was not something that would make him feel good, or loved, or embraced. It would not be clearly known because it was effortless, or because it had a good “flow.” It would lack much by way of warm feeling and predictability. It would be filled with conflict and stress. It would entail broken relationships and disappointments that would certainly detract from the spiritual highs. Paul's purpose was to bring benefit to the family of Christ, and before any of us can find our purpose we

must embrace this grand over-arching one. Each member of the family of God finds their purpose in this larger one of benefiting Christ's Church.

This idea of Paul's purpose is central to his thought in this verse. From this idea, expressed in the middle of the verse we can work backwards through the first part of the verse. We find that this purpose was being realized in Paul as a result of a "stewardship" from God. A "stewardship" in biblical terms is a trust. It is being entrusted with an important responsibility to manage something that belongs to someone else. It involves privilege, responsibility, accountability, and reward. In that sense it is what we would call a "position of responsibility." We infer in that phrase that something is more than a job. It is both demanding and rewarding. So Paul's purpose became the benefit and welfare of the Church, and this was the result of a position of responsibility bestowed on Him by God.

Paul's title, the one associated with this position of responsibility, was "minister." The term refers to one who serves by providing what is necessary for certain processes to move along. It likely came from a word that described one who ran errands. In our day it is used of those who make their living as a religious leader. In Paul's writings it did not refer necessarily to a paid position or even a religious one (See its use in Romans 13:4). It simply described one who provided a necessary service in the accomplishment of a larger objective. In this case Paul provided such service to advance the Church, the body of Christ.

The stewardship, or trust, bestowed on Paul by God was ministry to His Church, but this did not mean his ministry was shaped by the Church. It was bestowed by God and shaped by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. It is the same for every leader called by God to His work. This is always a delicate balancing act for spiritual leaders. They must serve the Church, lead the Church, even be submissive as any other believer to the Church. They must shepherd the Church, by being certain that all parties are being led by God. A minister in the sense Paul and the Lord uses the term does not simply provide what the people of the Church want. Aaron did that with disastrous results (Ex. 32). Leaders must serve the interests of God and facilitate the godly interests and leadings in their people.

The last phrase in this verse shows that this was true of Paul. His ministry was not about what people wanted or clamored for. His stewardship, the specific mission God had entrusted to him involved revelation of a new era, of logical but sweeping change in and among the community of God. Paul would proclaim that which had been here-to-for unknown. The "preaching" referred to here is not the normal work ministers and teachers have done for centuries, that of teaching and applying the Word of God. In fact, the word preaching does not occur in the Greek text. It is added in order to convey the idea of proclamation that is inferred in the following verse. There was information God wished to add to his written word, that would make the revelation of the Old Testament clearer. The next verse will clearly bring this out. The mission God entrusted to Paul was to convey this expanded message through spoken and written word, so that it would become known to all.

Paul says here that his mission, according to the stewardship given to him for the Church's benefit, was to bring to fullness or completion the Word of God. This involved the disclosure of information that brought clarity to four areas. First, it made the sufferings of Jesus clearly visible in the Old Testament and so made the way of salvation for man clearly visible. Second, it made known how the community of God was to conduct itself now, given the death of Jesus Christ. Third, it made known how God's word to Israel, both His directives and His promises would be fulfilled. Fourth, it made clear the error that tends to develop in us that leads us to believe we can

obey our way into favor with God. The New Testament exposes completely the inadequacy of the works of the Law to justify us with God. Paul's writings are key in shedding light on these mysteries of the Faith.

Much of God's purpose for Paul involved the orderly presentation of information that would provide these four important lines of truth to the Church during the coming centuries. Most of us will not do a work anything like that of Paul. But the principle of purpose is the same. Our purpose will in some way contribute to the health of the body of Christ. We move closer to our purpose as we focus on that priority.

### **1:26—That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints,”**

The stewardship or treasure entrusted to Paul was truth. That is the most prized possession of God we have access to in this life. It was in Paul's case, truth that had been obscure, but now was made plain and was to be proclaimed. It was not that this truth was not present in the Old Testament. It was like any other hidden thing. Its presence was concealed and could be passed over, and its detail missed. Paul will identify this mystery in a concise statement in the next verse, but for now he simply calls it a mystery.

A mystery exists where a result is seen and the detail of how it came to be is unknown. The Old Testament projected much that would come to be. There were four important things prophesied. First, that there would be forgiveness of sin extended by God to all men (Ez. 36:24-27). Second, that God's Spirit would be poured out on humanity (Joel 2:28; Jer 31:31-37). Third that Israel would be restored (Zech. 8:8). Fourth, that Gentiles would turn to Yahweh (Is. 49:6). These things were apparent throughout the Old Testament, but how exactly they would come to be was a mystery. There were hints, such as the allusions to a suffering Messiah (Is. 53). But definitive statements about how this would all be achieved were absent. It remained for God to reveal exactly how this work would be done, and His chosen instrument in this revelatory act was Paul. Paul brought to light the truth latent in the types, symbols, and statements of the Old Testament that had not been set forth and explained in plain statements.

There is much by way of theology, doctrine, eschatology, and the daily practice of the faith that we understand due to the writings of Paul. Dedicated men for ages searched the Old Testament for clearer experience of the things of God (1 Pet. 1:10-12). It was not a lack of diligence that led to gaps in their experience. It was simply hidden from eternity past, through many generations of humanity until the time of Christ and the revelatory acts He choreographed through men of His choosing like Paul. In this verse, without stating clearly what the mystery was, Paul simply speaks of its former existence and the fact that it is now revealed and brought to light.

**1:27—“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.”**

From the beginning of God’s relationship to Abraham and his children, God intended to use them to bring His truth to the rest of earth’s people groups (Gen. 12:1-3). Though this was not always understood or embraced by Israel, it was always a part of God’s plan for them. The time simply had to come for that to occur. And so when God became a man, He became a Jew by ethnicity and immersed Himself in life with them. He made Himself known clearly and plainly to them. Many did not receive Him but some did. To these holy ones, or saints, He revealed more of Himself. Through them He began to make Himself known to the rest of humanity. Paul was among these Jews, part of a remnant, a small minority in Israel who believed in Jesus and began to live his life through the power of the Spirit. They proclaimed the truth about Him to all people and tutored them in the way of life He lived, a life of continuous fellowship with Yahweh. This is the transformation and evolution in God’s family that Paul is describing here.

The verse begins with the phrase ‘to whom,’ which can be understood as ‘through whom.’ It refers back to His saints in the previous verse. These were His chosen ones from among Israel who believed in Him. These would make known among the Gentiles the ‘riches of the glory of this mystery.’ Paul identifies the mystery, but first there is this descriptive phrase of its glory. To describe the immensity of the weightiness of the truth of the gospel would defy words. It is richly glorious. What it brings to us in terms of hope alone is beyond description. Its potential in terms of imparting character, wisdom and understanding is limitless. And these only speak of glories related to this life. The gospel supplies truth to our minds that then stimulates an endless array of mental journeys we must take in order to begin to imagine the eternally rich glory of the gospel.

The verse ends with a statement of the great mystery which Paul’s ministry would enable the Church to publish to every tribe and nation. It is the message of the New Testament encapsulated in seven words—“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” It should be understood as this, “Christ, the hope of glory, residing within you.” It captures the magnificence of Christ, the wonder of grace, the end to which all events reported by the gospel work. It does so without removing the mystery of the faith.

Christ is the hope of glory. Paul is most likely expressing that He is the hope of all the heavenly hosts. He is the one whose character and nature guarantees all that defines heaven. He is the one who guarantees the subjection of Satan. He is the one whose work will restore creation. Very little is written for us in Scripture about how evil came to be or about all the characters involved in its evolution into its own kingdom. But it is evil and is a sordid threat to the well-being of humanity. Earth and humanity are small examples of the power of evil to bring ruin, a power understood fully among heaven’s beings. Jesus Christ is the hope of these heavenly hosts, the one who has made the eventual outcome of this colossal contest secure and certain. It can go no other way. The very Spirit of this one who was Himself Yahweh incarnate, is now joined to all who believe, living within them. They are by that act of His sealed as His (Eph 1:13), so that they are secure as well. The restoration of the full glory of God to creation, including humanity, is certain to be fulfilled. His presence now in them is His pledge to complete this that He has promised to do.

This is the great mystery that can help all people interpret personal events and world events. It is a statement that alludes to what was and what will be and states clearly what is. In the chaos of

life as it has been warped by evil, this is our stability. Christ the hope of glory in us (Is 33:6), assures us of the outcome.