

We all know that getting older is no picnic. And often, we have to focus on our health more than we used to. We also still have a spiritual ministry to continue as we age. There is no better way to finish our course than serving the Lord. But we may need to strengthen ourselves. Let me illustrate.

One of the things that helps us when we get older is still increasing the time we exercise with strength training. Medical science has demonstrated that even when we get into our 90s, we can stop muscle loss and increase it by a pound or two. Indeed, our bodies don't respond to physical fitness like they once did. But they do respond, and resistance is known to build our muscles and bones. We may not get into it, but we can slow down our muscle loss even if we do light resistance. Our bodies work better. Spiritually, ministry strengthens our spiritual muscles. Ministry is not easy, and even if we only do it part-time when we're older for interest, the interest of others and helping others to grow is where we take our focus today.

Well, turn your Bible to Colossians chapter 1:24. Wonderful, wonderful scripture is ahead here where we see balance in what Paul is doing, both in encouragement and as a needed warning, but as a principle warning that applies to many different things. We will want to look at authentic ministry as we get into these things. We want to see how he encourages those believers. We want to help you understand our foundation, our foundation. And then, finally, a warning.

I don't know if I will get through all of this. If I went that way, there would be a sermon in each of these paragraphs, so we're good. But it's a fantastic, excellent section of scripture. Let's read Col. 1:24-29.

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and filled up in my flesh what is lacking in the affections of Christ or the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church, of which I became minister according to the stewardship from God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God. The mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations but now has been revealed to his saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end, I also labor, striving according to his workings, which works in me mightily."

Now, what comes to mind when you first hear the word suffering. You know, the first thing that comes to your mind. With Paul, it was rejoicing. It was rejoicing. Now, the first thing that comes to mind in suffering is ouchie. That hurt

or pain, or I feel that. There's something like that. Like I shared in Sunday school, this is a new pain. And that's my first reaction, which you might say was that Paul had a better one than you did. Yeah, he did. He did, but he had a chance to go through the pain to where he got to the outcome of now rejoicing in my suffering for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

Now, there is something about suffering that Christ said we would share. There's something about it where we are going to share those sufferings. None of us will be able to share the sufferings on the cross where Jesus died for our sins. That he did, and he said it was finished. It had its effect. He died on the cross for our sins. He shed his blood on the cross, and our sins were forgiven. None of us could do that.

But Jesus said, you know, in this world, you will have tribulations. And his half-brother James said, "Consider all joy when you encounter various trials" and "temptations."¹ We should know that in our life, we should expect because we live in a fallen world, but it's more than that. We also live in a world that is not in agreement with God. And when we share Christ with other people, we will automatically be part of what the world thinks about Christ. And if they rejected Jesus, they may also reject us. So if they reject Jesus, they may also reject us. And Jesus said, expect that. And so, you know, there's two parts of that. We all know about our suffering from the fall and how it affects us as we progress. But there's also that spiritual aspect that we also participate in. And it's part of our witness. And in that part, we should learn to rejoice because we've been privileged to join in and participate in the sufferings of Christ. And Paul talks about that in the book of Philippians,² where we participate. So that's what he's talking about here.

What Christ did on the cross is finished, complete, done. Nothing can be added to that. But Jesus said, "I have been persecuted, so will you be persecuted. Who was the number one persecutor of the church in the Book of Acts? His name was Saul. And he was the number one persecutor of the church. He even got papers and put people in jail, and they were killed and died for their faith. And Paul was all part of that. He was on the road to Damascus to put Christians in jail and persecute them. That's what Paul was doing. And then, along the way, he met somebody.

¹ James 1:2, 12

² Phil. 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Jesus himself said, after he blinded him after he sent everybody to Paul's party in confusion, he said to Paul, why do you persecute me? Paul said, well, who are you that I'm persecuting? He says I am Jesus. On that road, Paul had a complete change of life. I want you to know something, though. Paul, the Jews who were persecuting the people in the way The leaders of the Jews always saw Paul as a traitor. (audience laughing) A traitor to their cause. And they always had hatred for Paul because he was one of them. And he flipped. Why in the heck did the Jewish people go through all the commotion everywhere where Paul went? Why, later in the book of Acts, after many years, are the Jewish people trying to kill him? And I'm talking about the leaders now. Why are they trying to kill Paul? Why did they take an actual oath, many of them, to put Paul to death? Why? 'Cause he betrayed them, and they never forgot.

That's how politics is. If you go to the other side of politics, the people you used to hang around, they don't forget that you changed. 'Cause that's how politics works. And that's what happened to Paul. So here he's rejoicing in these sufferings because he's been counted worthy to do so. Okay?

Helping Those Who Are Suffering

Now there's three things about authentic ministry that Paul is talking about. First, a ministry is authentic when the ministry comes alongside or even personally suffers for Christ. Somebody who's a minister of the gospel will share the gospel and then be judged accordingly by people who are critical of the gospel. And that isn't one of, "Boy, that's a great fellow. "Look at him just preaching the gospel, "and people are getting saved. "Isn't that the greatest thing you ever heard?" No, that's not how the world thinks. And as soon as you start proclaiming Christ and people know about it, they respond to you. Like, "Oh, some people have left my Facebook account." (laughs) You know, they respond. Not so much negatively or positively. We do run into that.

However, the other aspect is that sometimes the ministry has to help people who are always suffering. Oh, you got a problem? You're going through something? Let's see what God can do, and I'll help you. I'll go with you through it, and we'll see what God does. That's what the ministry does. It comes alongside. So, in your ministries, when you're sharing with people and helping people, you can stand with people who are going through troubles. You know, and you can help them.

And, you know, when a couple of you visited Bill Hoke the other day. You went into where he is, and he's in the veteran home where people need a lot of care. So your nose got somebody smells, and you realized people were

suffering because they no longer cared for themselves. Maybe you saw things when you went into the room, and there were people there that were very crippled because of age. It's not an easy sight. But you went alongside somebody who was there, and you talked to him, and you prayed with him. Bill, I gave you some scripture while you were there, and it was a time of fellowship.

But that's what we do. We help people who are going through difficult times. We're praying right now for Mary as she goes through some difficult times. Oh, I wish I could be down and visit her, but you know, we pray for her. You know, that's what ministry does. It identifies with the suffering or suffering himself.

We Proclaim Christ

The second thing that ministry does is in vs. 25, "that which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God, and which was given to me to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden in ages and generations now has been revealed to the saints. To them, to make known what the riches of glory are, the mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you," Christ in you is the theme of Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory, we preach, we warn, we teach every man in all wisdom that we may present every man and woman, that's what it's talking about here, perfect in Christ Jesus.

So the authentic ministry is preaching that preaching it, teaching it, doing both things where there's, you know, there's the, well, that'll come a little later. Still, you know, there's an admonishing that happens, a warning, there are things you gotta be aware of that hurt you. Then there are things that you have to be taught, how to go through something, you know, how to pray when there's something hard to pray about, that's something that we have to learn to do, you know, and learning to pray like that is everything. Oh, I'll put off praying like that until the spring, and then the spring comes along; oh, oh, I'll pray like that until the summertime. Oh, no, no, you know I like the fall better. Leaves are changing color, and that's when I'll pray.³ No, no, no, no, no, this is something that we gotta do today and tomorrow, you know, we have to learn to pray today and trust God. So that's part of this ministry of proclaiming Christ.

³ **Procrastination** or waiting until I retire then I will have time to study the Bible. You know we have to make it a priority to do things in the present. To put off important things like prayer and Bible study will not do it all. Take time to do these things. If, and when you do retire because you're doing them now you may be more likely to spend more time later. But if you're not doing them now, you are just as likely do them when you retire. Think about it.

Ministry is Hard Work

Now, notice the third thing is in verse 29. "To this end, I also labor, striving according to the working which works in me mightily." Ministry is hard work. Ministry will always fail when people are lazy about it. If they're slothful, it's not gonna work. There has to be the labor and the striving, but there is a difference. "According to his working which works in me mightily." We give it our all in the ministry, but we also depend on his power to work through us. There's a dependency that has to happen as you minister.

And if I were to train anybody young in the ministry today, I would tell them it's hard. In fact, it's impossible. In fact, you're gonna need God's help to help you do it. And you have to learn to depend on the Lord to do it. But it is work. You gotta be willing to do the job. But you also have to be willing to depend on the Lord. We can't do it any other way. And Paul gives it out here. So that's cool.

Benefits & Position

Now, the benefits of grace. My, they're fantastic—the benefits of grace. We've received redemption. God redeemed us. The blood of the lamb bought us. God reconciled us and brought us to Himself. We are now reconciled. And if we have the forgiveness of sins, that's a benefit. He's forgiven us. And then Christ lives in them by the spirit, filling them with inner hope. You know, those are all benefits that we have.

I know I said this a couple of weeks ago, but if you know Christ as your Savior, you are seated with God in the heavenly places. You're now in heaven. No, wait a minute. I'm sitting in these red chairs, Reeves. You can see it. You're sitting in one, too. But this is where we really are. We're really in heaven. That's our position.

Let me give you another startling fact. If you trust that Christ is your Savior, do you know that you're dead? You've died to sin. You're dead. You're saying, wait a minute. No, I'm not dead. I'm still wiggling. I'm still moving. Yeah. And we will continue to move like that. Okay. But positionally, we died on the cross. Every one of us. And one day, truly, unless he comes again, where we will be translated into the air, we will go through death one day. And we always pray for a long life of fruitfulness in that if we can, that's always good, to choose life, to choose life every time. Despite a cloudy day, we choose life. But these are all blessings that we have been given. You know. Just wonderful.

There Are Warnings

There is a balance in ministry. Warning. Aren't you glad that we have warning signs? How awful would it be to discover that an electrical line is down, and you didn't know it was down, stepped on it, and then knew it? You know, (buzzing) didn't do you much good. But it's good if they got warning signs telling you, "Watch out." How many are glad that there are stop signs? Or should we get away with them? And play chicken every time we go to the corners—scary stuff. Warnings are important.

And he's gonna get into warnings, and he's going to talk about five problems in chapter two. Enticing words, chapter two, verses four to seven. Philosophy, legality, mysticism, and asceticism. And Paul is gonna give warnings about all of these things.

Now, we're not going to cover much of this, so I'm setting this up for you to make sure you start reading chapter two, verses 1:10. Actually, it goes all the way to 3:4, but that's what he's going to be talking about.

Ministry has a Goal

The goal that we have to become mature in Christ is maturity. That's our goal: to become mature in Christ. Maturity is understanding the gospel. Turn with me if you would like to read 1 Corinthians chapter 15. We want to be clear about the foundations. And there's nothing more apparent in the foundation than the good news of Jesus Christ. So listen carefully and follow along as I read chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, verse one. "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which was preached to you, which also you received, and in which you stand."

Ministry is to Everybody

Paul mainly had two things revealed to him very clearly in his ministry. One was there's gonna be a new body. And this new body will invite every type of person on the planet to join, whether they're both Jew or Gentile. See, every one of us, if we're not Jewish, we are Gentile; that's our race. Sometimes, we define race according to any color, differential, or whatever. But really, there are two races with God. One is Jewish, and the other one is Gentile. And Christ wanted the gospel to go out into the whole world.

That's why he told Peter,⁴ "You see that sheet of food? "All that stuff that's prohibited for you to eat? "Well, that's part of your Jewish fellowship. "Now, I want you to get ready for the whole world. "Everything is clean, and you can eat it." Why? Now, Peter and the other disciples will have to learn to sit and eat with other people with all of their food differences to present the gospel to them. It's all clean, and that's why it's in Acts chapter 10. Read it, but that's why it's being presented. He's opening up the whole world for the gospel.

God revealed to Paul that he was the guy who was really going to take this up. Peter had his problems, you remember? He had his problems with it. He would learn, but Paul called off of Damascus Road. He's ready to do it, he's ready to go. So, the gospel to the whole world was real to Paul. And that wonderful mystery that both Jews and Gentiles now are one body—that's his revelation.

Okay, verse two. "By which you were also saved if you hold fast the word "which is preached to you, "unless you have believed in vain." Now, here it is. "For I delivered to you first of all "that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures."⁵ everybody needs to hear. Christ died according to the scriptures for our sins. We're all sinners. Yeah, but I'm a good person. But good people, he died for your sins. Bad people, he died for your sins. He died for everybody so that God could forgive their sins. Okay, according to the scriptures. Now, he was buried. And when he was buried, he took all of our sins, and on his body, he died, and he's buried. And if you trust Christ as your Savior, all of your sins are forgiven. And you know, in your fleshly sinful life, fleshly sinful life, you now have died to Christ. You're buried too. That's what baptism's about. Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and we were baptized, which symbolizes that death. And then God raises us out of the water because it tells us here that "he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures. Now, he was seen by Cephas, he was seen by the 12. He was seen by 500 people, brethren. As I told you before, all you girls out there today are your brethren. All of those 500 there, and there were women there, by the way, at once. And he says many of these people were still alive when he wrote this book. But some of them have died.

⁴ Acts 10:9-16 In Acts 1:8 the gospel will go world-wide. Food is a big part of our social interaction. Having the ability to have a diet flexible enough to share the gospel is an interesting insight to the vision Peter had. He was opening the gospel and the work of the Spirit not to the Jews only but to the Gentiles.

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:3-8

That's the gospel. That's what saves us. And when we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins when we think that we too died, we died to sin; when he was buried, we were buried, and on the third day, he rose again. And I'm gonna tell you in Romans, that tells us that God approved, Romans, 1:4⁶ God approved of His Son's death, and he demonstrated to the whole world that his death was acceptable for everybody. Okay, that's the logic you'll pick up in the book of Romans. That's our foundation. That's what we gotta believe. And look at that: I only got through one paragraph. I knew I wouldn't get to the end, but I don't really care. There's a sermon there.

You can do that right now if you haven't accepted Christ as your Savior.

Lord, you know I'm a sinner, and yet you died for my sins. You shed your blood, and by that shedding of blood, you washed me and forgave me of my sin. Yes, you died for my sins.

Rembrandt had it right. If you ever see Rembrandt's painting of Jesus on the cross, he got it right, okay? Rembrandt has people raising Christ on the cross, but if you look at the picture he painted at the bottom of the cross doing the raising of the cross, it's Rembrandt himself highlighted. You see, Jesus came and died for the whole world, and Rembrandt understood that. Pretty good. You need to see it in a painting.

If you trust Christ and believe in Jesus Christ, God can save you from your sins. He can give you eternal life, for God so loved the world that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That can be yours. Now, if you're ever uncertain about these kinds of things, about whether or not you have trusted Christ, please, I'd like to talk to you, okay? Pastor Rains would love to talk to you, okay? We would show you from the Bible how you can be sure that you know Christ. Let's make this effective today.

Reach out to One

This week, minister to somebody. Help somebody who's having a hard time. Pick somebody you'll pray about and help that you don't like. It's easy to help somebody you like. But minister to 'em. And if you have somebody in your life who's in a bad way, somebody in your life who needs to know the Lord, don't wait for summer. Don't even wait for spring, 'cause we're still in winter. But

⁶ “and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

pray for that person today that they might come to know the Lord. And then follow through as much as possible to help win that person to Christ?

I'd be glad to share a tract with 'em if that helps. Maybe somebody has had a bad day, and there's good news there to help them get out of it. Make it real. Make it real. Please don't put it off. You know, a few of us in the room, and that young guy was in here for a while, we got a few years where, you know, you got a few years before you can do this or that, but most of us, we're in the here and now. We can't put it off anymore, you know? We are getting older and each day is a gift so reach out each day. It's now that we have to start doing these things. So apply that.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your word. I thank you for your words. I thank you for Paul's authentic ministry. Thank you for the example of authentic ministry demonstrated here over the years. Help us, Lord, to help people go through suffering and when we suffer, and to learn to take it to you so that you can help us in that suffering. And Lord, people will not like it when we share the good news, but allow us to rejoice that now we, too, are experiencing what Christ told us would happen. We were found worthy to suffer for him because his words and statements were accurate. People need Christ, and the world is calling out. I thank you for this gospel for the whole world; people need to trust you for it. So help us, Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.