

THE ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

“²⁴ Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church: ²⁵ Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; ²⁶ *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: ²⁷ To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: ²⁸ Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: ²⁹ Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Colossians 1:24-29).

In Colossians 1:23, Paul said he was made a “minister” of the gospel. What is a “minister”? The word is translated from the Greek word *diakonos* (dee-ak’-on-os). The primary meaning of the word is to be a servant. We cannot separate the obligation of this service from the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If we call Him Lord, we are obligated to serve Him.

All the various Gnostic sects promised salvation through an occult knowledge that they claimed was revealed to them alone through intermediary eternal beings, or Messengers of Light (*aeons*), sent from the *pleroma* (the divine realm of the gods) to restore the lost knowledge (Gnosis) of humanity’s divine origin. Salvation was the restoration of individuals to this *divine order* (much like modern Christian Reconstructionism).

However, like all cults, salvation was achieved, not received. Gnostic salvation is spiritual freedom from this physical existence. Physical existence is viewed as a predicament to escape from through enlightenment. In Gnosticism, man needs to be saved from the consequences of ignorance of the divine, not from the consequences of sin (condemnation and death). Within Christian Gnosticism, Jesus was the Savior not because of His propitiatory, substitutionary sacrifice at Calvary, but through His *teachings*. These *teachings* were viewed as *mysteries* to be understood allegorically. Gnosis (salvation) needed to be stimulated by the Messengers of Light (*aeons*) as they moved the *pilgrim* along the pathway of enlightenment. These Messengers of Light established salvific mysteries (sacraments) that could be administered by their apostles (clergymen) as their successors (sacerdotal successionism).

As an individual advanced through the various stages (levels; *aeons*) of Gnosis, that individual advance himself in status among his peers seeking to be restored to the realm of the divine order (salvation; the ultimate Gnosis; *pleroma*). Individuals were viewed as being closer to their own godhood as they moved upward in these various degrees of knowledge. This knowledge (Gnosis) was the *divine life*. Enlightenment brought the *pilgrim* slowly along on his journey to his own *divinity*. The Gnostic search for *God* turns the seeker’s attention towards his own inner being. The modern Gnostic does not seek salvation in either the inspired or incarnate Word of God. He seeks salvation in the metaphysics of Jungian *Depth Psychology*.

This all seems so complex and so foreign to anyone who understands the simplicity of God’s plan of redemption and His use of the “born again” human agent to bring the saving knowledge of Christ and His work to the lost world. God has ordained the local church to be His vehicle for the communication of the gospel to the lost world. He does this as the “saints” are equipped to do the “work of the ministry” through their local church.

Diakonos was a general term applied to those engaged in service of any sort, especially and distinctively the seemingly menial work of a being a bond servant. In the world, the word “servant” distinguished an individual to be of the lowest social order. However, it became a common identification for the early Christians. The words “minister” (*diakonos*) and “servant” (*doulos*) were used interchangeably for Christians.

“⁴² But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. ⁴³ But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister {*diakonos*}: ⁴⁴ And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant {*doulos*} of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of man came not to be ministered {*diakoneo*} unto, but to minister {*diakoneo*}, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45; compare Rom. 1:1; Php. 2:7; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; II Pet. 1:1 and Jude 1:1).

These two words (minister and servant) describe the attitude of Christian service. This attitude involves two details of life:

1. The renunciation of a person’s individual rights and freedoms.
2. The commitment to a life of lowly service.

THE PRESSURES OF SERVICE

“Who” in Colossians 1:24 is better “I.” “Who” refers to Paul. Christian service should carry with it an attitude of rejoicing, but there are many *stepping stones through the fire* within Christian service. Ministry comes with many fiery trials. This is what Paul refers to by the use of the word “afflictions.” “Afflictions” is translated from the Greek word *thlipsis* (thlip’-sis). It simply means pressure. Paul was realizing humiliation in his own life similar to the suffering with which Christ was humiliated before His crucifixion. These pressures of the ministry come in the forms of rejection, ridicule and various degrees of persecution.

The results of these pressures on the ministering Saint is “sufferings” (Col. 1:24). We do not rejoice because of sufferings, but in the midst of them. We endure sufferings because of the hope of the realization of salvation and maturity in the lives of those we have chosen to serve.

“¹ Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, ² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. ⁴ Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:1-4).

Seeking to live righteously for righteousness sake and standing for truth will eventually bring persecution (“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” II Tim. 3:12). Being as Christ-like servant he will demand enormous amounts of time and will frequently be exhausting. We will suffer emotionally due to the resistance to truth by those we serve and the persecution from those who resist.

THE PURPOSE OF SERVICE: “for his body’s sake, which is the church”

The purpose of service is for the “body’s sake” (the “body” of which Christ is “head”). It is only by serving the “body” that we anoint the “head.”

“¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: . . . ¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:12 and 16).

THE ELEMENTS OF SERVICE (Colossians 1:25)

Paul was made a “minister” or servant of the local church, the body of Christ. All ministry is to be done through the local church. Any ministry that is not umbilicalized to the local church is unbiblical. The local church is the “household of God” (not house, but “household;” Eph. 2:19). All of the collective family members are under one Patriarch, i.e. Christ Jesus.

This is “according to the dispensation of God;” i.e. THE LAW of the HOUSEHOLD. The idea here is stewardship of and faithfulness to a mandate. As an Apostle, Paul was to administrate the laws that regulated the proper conduct of God’s “household” (local church).

This was to be done in order “to fulfill the Word of God” (Col. 1:25). This refers to a complete and full understanding of God’s PLAN, PROGRAM and PURPOSE. Paul’s goal was to bring all those under his care into the perimeters defined by God’s plan, program and purpose. This involves TWO RESPONSIBILITIES for the servant.

1. The accurate communication of God’s Word and the message and ideas it conveys.
2. Personal obedience to that which is learned or taught.

THE “MYSTERY” OF GENTILE SERVICE (Colossians 1:26)

There was something hidden in the Scriptures from the previous generations, especially the Jew. That does not mean it wasn’t there, but that God did not give them understanding to its meaning. That “mystery” was the free admission of the Gentiles to the promises of the covenant.

“¹ For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, ² If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: ³ How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ⁴ Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: ⁷ Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ⁸ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: ¹² In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Ephesians 3:1-12).

Therefore, it should be considered a great privileged for the Gentile to be able to serve God. Somehow people think that because they have submitted their lives to serving that they are doing God a favor. In reality it is God who shows the servant grace by allowing sinners to serve in any capacity. This is what is meant by the words “the riches of His glory among the Gentiles.”

The preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles brought forth “abundant” fruit. “Riches” signifies that it produced an overwhelming harvest of servants. The purpose of evangelism is not to simply produce souls, but to produce servants (Matthew 28:20).

THE METHODOLOGY OF SERVICE: methodology is the study of methods and means.

Colossians 1:28, (Jesus) “whom we preach;” a system of doctrine is powerless unless it centers on the LORDSHIP of its giver. Lordship relates a submission to the giver of truth and to the truth that is given. Therefore, to teach the body of truth revealed to us by Jesus as His representative servant is to convey His message, not ours. In doing so, we “preach Jesus.”

“Warnings” and “teaching;” it is essential that the servant has a balanced exhortation of God’s Word; i.e. “in all wisdom.” People need to be warned of the danger they are in if they will not study to know and obey God’s Word. People need to be taught (or corrected) when they wander into areas where they ought not to be. It is cruelty, not kindness, which does not deal with people who continue in their rebellious wanderings.

WISDOM is the HEART and MIND of God operating in the life of the believer. Therefore, “warnings and teaching” must direct those wandering outside of the circle of truth back into the will of God.

THE INTENTION OF MINISTRY; the end to the means

“That we present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” The central focus of God’s message is not on QUANTITY, but QUALITY. All too often Christian growth is measured only in numbers, not in DEPTH. The true objective of Christian service is growth in depth, not in size. Size will be the natural product of depth. It is not enough to bring a person to a profession of faith. The labor of service is to bring them to full maturity. Ask any mother, she will tell you that her labor wasn’t in giving birth to a child, but the two decades that followed.

THE LABOR OF SERVICE (Colossians 1:29)

Ministry that takes the Lord seriously, in both His Word and our practice of it, is hard work. “Labour” in Colossians 1:29 is from the Greek word *kopiaio* (kop-ee-ah’-o). It means to be weary with toil or burdens of grief. The word “striving” is from the Greek word *agonizomai* (ag-o-nid’-zom-ah-ee). It means to labor to the point of exhaustion or to agonize in effort. “Striving” refers to the spiritual struggle of ministry using the last ounce of one’s energy to bring a person a salvation and spiritual maturity.

Few people are willing to put this kind of effort into their own spiritual growth, let alone into the spiritual growth of others. Laboring to serve others and to help them grow spiritually is one of the best ways to promote our own spiritual growth.

THE POWER OF SERVICE, “according to His working”

“Working” is from the Greek word *energeia* (en-erg’-i-ah). It use in the N.T. is only used of a supernatural power (God’s or the Devil). God wants to supernaturally empower each believer for ministry. This supernatural empowering is essential to fruitful ministry.

Paul labored, not in his own strength, but the strength of the indwelling Christ. In his own strength, Paul would have given up the struggle to bring believers to maturity. Because of the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Paul was able to keep on fighting and struggling for the establishment of truth in the lives of believers (it is a battle).

This is what Paul refers to by the words, “which worketh in me mightily” (or powerfully). The strength of Christ is not something the believer needs to plead with God about. The strength of Christ is naturally and inherently available to any OBEDIENT BELIEVER.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (II Peter 1:4).

THE ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

1. What is a “minister”? _____

- Does that describe your life for Christ? _____
2. Describe the ATTITUDE of ministry? _____

3. In Colossians 1:24, who does the “who” specifically refer to? _____
4. Read Hebrews 12:1-4. Why should true ministering saints rejoice in “afflictions” and “sufferings” for the cause of Christ? _____
 - A. Should a soldier expect to be bruised or wounded in battle? _____
 - B. According to II Timothy 3:12, should they expect persecution? _____
5. What is the purpose of ministering (Col. 1:24 and Eph. 4:12 & 16)? _____

6. What is the *funnel* through which all ministry must to be directed and administrated? _____

7. Read Colossians 1:27. What was the result of “the riches of His glory among the Gentiles”? _____

- A. Why was this a “mystery” (Col. 1:26)? _____

- B. To whom was it a “mystery”? _____
8. The PURPOSE of evangelism is not to simply produce souls, but to produce _____.
9. What three statements in Colossians 1:28 relate the METHODOLOGY of ministry?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
10. According to Colossians 1:28, what is the intent of this methodology of ministry? _____

11. According to Colossians 1:29, what kind of effort does Christ expect of His servants? _____

12. Where will the energy come from for that kind of effort? _____
13. What will happen to people who try to put forth that kind of effort in their own strength? _____
