



The Sermon

Mark Becker

Colossians 1:24-29

"God's Model for Ministry"

May 21, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Well, good morning. Wow, we've got responsive readings this morning. It is a joy to be with you here this morning. We have come to a great passage in Colossians 1. If you are visiting with us, we teach through the Bible one book at a time. We teach verse by verse, and this morning we have reached verses 24 through 29 in Colossians 1. I have titled this message "God's Model for Ministry."

If you are older like me and you grew up in a non-digital age and you remember your days back in the classroom, there were no electronic devices. I can honestly say thinking back to my childhood and where children are today, the teacher never had to ask me to put away my phone or silence my phone, because we didn't have phones. The best technology that we had in the classroom was an overhead projector. And if you remember the overhead projector, the teacher would lay a transparency, typically in black ink, over the projector, take the knob, turn the knob to focus it, and then we would begin to take notes. If the teacher was really advanced, they would then lay a second transparency over the first, maybe in a different color ink, to reveal more about the subject matter, to paint a fuller picture, to give us a more comprehensive view of the subject.

And that's really what I want to do this morning. As we approach these verses, I want to look at it from two perspectives, two transparencies, if you will, in a parallel way. First, we need to understand what Paul is saying.

Not only do we need to understand what Paul is saying, we need to understand why he is writing this to the church at Colossae and the surrounding cities in that valley. The second transparency, if you will, that will overlay this is, "How do these verses apply to us today? How do these verses apply to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas? What do they mean to us specifically?"

If you've been visiting with us or been here following along, there is a heresy in Colossians in the Colossian church. It is a combination of Gnosticism and Judaism. It's an amalgamation that had many errors. But two of the main errors of this heresy are the fact that it denied the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it denied His ability to save. And so as Paul has been writing this letter, he has set forth two great doctrines. He has set forth the doctrine of Christology, the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ, His deity; and then he has set forth the doctrine of soteriology, that He saves, that at the cross, through the blood, the purchase price of His blood, He reconciled us to Himself. And as that is a backdrop as we get to the verses today, he goes to the doctrine of ecclesiology, he goes to the doctrine of the church. It's how we do church, why we do church.

And so, again, the title of this message is "God's Model for Ministry." In order to set the context of what Paul is writing to really get the theme of the message, we're going to really start - we need to back up a verse and start in verse 23. So if you have your Bibles, read along with me. Colossians 1, starting in verse 23, Paul writes, "If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." That last phrase in verse 23 sets the subject, sets the theme of our verses, "of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

Verse 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 what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so 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 has 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. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man, teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete." The ESV translates this "mature," and I think that's the sense of the word, "so that we may present every man complete, or mature, in Christ. For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Let's pray.

[Prayer] Dear heavenly Father, You have brought us to a point in the Scriptures this morning where You give us great wisdom and insight into the church, into us, Your body that You purchased with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray, Lord, that You would honor Your word with Your Spirit, that Your word would go out in power this morning, and that You would give us great understanding of what You have done; and, Lord, not only what You have done, what You have called us to do. I pray, Lord, that You would bless the remembrance at the Lord's Supper, that the Lord Jesus Christ gave His body and blood for His people. May all these things be for Your glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

I've broken these verses down into three sections: "God's minister," verses 23, the last part of 23 to 25; "God's mystery," verses 26 and 27; and "God's message" in verses 28 and 29. So let's start, "God's minister."

Paul reveals that he is a minister, in verse 23, that he is a minister of the gospel, that he is a minister that proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ in the gospel. And Paul gives us four characteristics of this ministry that he has been given. The first point is that "he was made a minister." If you look back at verse 23 it says that Paul had been made a minister. The word that is used for minister in the Greek is *diakonos*. It's the word that we get the word "deacon" from. It literally means servant. It's a common servant. It's a table waiter. It's the one who takes away the dishes from the table when the meal is finished. Paul is calling himself a common servant, he's calling himself a minister, but he tells us something very important: it's not of his

own doing. He has been made a *diakonos*, he has been made a minister by God.

Verse 25 uses the same language: "Of this church I was made a minister." Paul was a minister by God's divine appointment. This was not what he was seeking. Remember when Saul comes onto the stage in the Bible in the book of Acts, he was headed to Damascus to arrest Christians, not to minister to them. And so it's interesting when he goes - and if you turn with me to Acts 26 - Paul is recounting what happened to him as he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

He's recounting this story to King Agrippa, and in verse 13 of Acts 26 he says, "At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up, stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you've seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.' - That word, "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a minister," the Greek word there literally means under-rower. It's somebody who is rowing in the galley of a ship, deep into the ship laboring in obscurity and in darkness, unnoticed. That's what he's saying. Jesus tells him, "I've appointed you." Again, divine appointment. He says in verse 17 - 'rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'" Saul did not go to seminary to be a minister, he was called by God to be a minister. This was a divine calling. This is often how God works.

Consider Moses. Moses sees the burning bush in Exodus 3; the Lord reveals who He is to Moses; Moses does not want to go back to Egypt and Pharaoh. And so when the Lord tells him that He's sending him back in Exodus 4,

Moses says to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I've never been eloquent, neither recently or nor in times past, nor since You've spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." In other words, "Lord, please send somebody else." The Lord appoints His ministers. The Lord had a plan for Moses that Moses wasn't even fully comprehending. Fast-forward to the Gospels. In Matthew, "Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee. He sees two brothers, Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen, and He said to them, 'Follow Me, I will make you,' - there it is again - 'I will make you fishers of men.'"

The one who is qualified to be a minister for God is the one whom God makes the minister. It has to be a divine calling, and so the minister needs to ask himself the question, "Is this of God's doing, or is it of my doing?" God must be the source of ministry. If it is not, that ministry will fade over time. Paul was made a minister of God by God Himself.

In Acts chapter 9, Ananias hears that Paul has been blinded on the Damascus road, and he warns the Lord about Saul. And the Lord answers Ananias and He says to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine." Saul had no idea, Ananias had no idea; but He says, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and the kings and the sons of Israel." God is the source of Paul's ministry.

So let's overlay the second transparency. How does this apply to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas? Who's in charge here? Whose church is this? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. We are about one thing and one thing only: we are here to do His bidding, we are here for His message, and we are here to do it His way. The Lord has established this church out of His providence. It has all been a work of providence.

I have been here since the very beginning. I was here before there were 12 people meeting at Matt's house. I know Matt, I know Kent, I know both of them very well, I know myself. This has been a work of God and a work of God alone. Trust me. The Lord has set the direction for this church, it wasn't what we thought it was going to be; He's provided for it. And if the

Lord causes this ministry to continue for years to come, it will be the Lord that is providing for this church that is driving this church forward.

We're the Lord's church. We're here for our triune God. And I will tell you this: if you have an agenda, if you have a motive, if you have a personal desire that is not in line with Christ's desire for this church, the Lord Jesus Christ will drive you out of this church. I have seen it happen with my own eyes over and over and over again in the last five years. Things that I was not even, that we were not even aware of, the Lord calls it to our attention.

So let's go back to Paul. He is a servant, he's a minister. He's a servant and a minister to God and of God. Think of how Paul often introduces himself in his letters. He says he's a bond servant. The Greek word is *doulos*. It literally means slave. Paul says, "I'm a slave," or, "I'm a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul has the heart of humility. Paul has the heart of service. Everything that he is doing is motivated by serving the Lord Jesus Christ. That should be common amongst all believers. That should be common amongst you and I, that should be our thought. We are here to do the Lord's bidding. We are here as the Lord's servants; we should not think more highly of ourselves.

He was made a minister. The second point is, "There is joy in the ministry." Verse 24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." This joy that Paul writes of – and we're going to talk about it – is often connected with suffering, because when we suffer, joy is not the natural response. Paul's life was characterized by his union with the Lord Jesus Christ, it was not characterized by circumstances, and so he had a joy. The believer has a joy that the world cannot understand. The reason is because the joy is not of this world, it transcends the world. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit; and only the believer can have it, and only the believer can understand it. Go to Acts 5 with me.

In Acts 5, Peter and the apostles are before the Sanhedrin for preaching Christ. And in verse 29, Luke writes, "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted at His right hand as a Prince and as a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.'"

They go out of the room, they counsel together, "What should we do with these men?" Gamaliel speaks up and says, "If it's of God, you're fighting of God. Warn them." Verse 40, the last half of the verse, "After calling the apostles in, they flog them, they beat them, and ordered them in intimidation not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they release them." Verse 41, "So they" - Peter and the apostles - "went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they have been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

The suffering that was inflicted at the flogging was to have a purpose. It was meant to deter them from doing it again. It was meant to deter them from preaching Christ. That was the very thing that the Council did not want them to do. But it had the opposite effect. It resulted in joy, and they continued to boldly preach the Lord Jesus Christ. How is that possible? That's only possible because it's not natural, it's joy from God. And Paul is saying that that characterizes, "Not only was I made a minister, but there is joy in my ministry."

Acts 16, Paul experiences the same thing. Paul and Silas are in Philippi. There's a slave girl that's demon-possessed that's prophesying behind them. Paul gets tired of it after a while and cast out the demons. "then it was realized" - verse 19 - "that her masters saw of the slave girl that their hope for profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, dragging them into the marketplace before the authorities." Verse 22, "The crowd rose up together against them. The chief magistrates tore their robes off of them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them

with many blows," - probably 39 blows - "they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks." At this point they're bloody, they're beaten up, they're constrained, they've got open wounds. This is not a pretty sight.

Verse 25, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." That's not the natural reaction. I want you to think about yourself. You and I come to a red light, and we get stuck at the red light and we complain. Paul and Silas have been brutally beaten, and they are singing praise to God. It's joy over circumstances. It's rooted, this joy is rooted in what God has done for them, it's rooted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was ever before their mind.

Point number three, "Suffering in ministry." We've been talking about it. "I rejoice in my suffering for your sake." Go back to Acts chapter 9. Paul's intent as he is on the road to Damascus before the Lord Jesus Christ arrested him was to force Christians to deny Christ. He did this with brutal force. The result of doing this would have been pain and affliction. And he did this to as many people as possible.

There's one other thing that the Lord told Ananias in Acts 9, it's verse 16. He says, "He's a chosen instrument," - verse 15 - "he will bear My name," - verse 16 - "for I will show him how much he will suffer, how much he must suffer for My name's sake." That characterized this suffering that the Lord appointed for him would characterize Paul's ministry all the way through. Everywhere he was met, he was driven out, he was stoned, he was beaten, he was shipwrecked; and he all did it because of the ministry he was called to, and the joy that he had in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He gets to the end of his life. He's almost completed the race that God has called him to run, and he writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join



with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God."  
Suffering for Christ characterized Paul's ministry.

At the end of verse 24 in Colossians 1 there's this phrase that we need to discuss: "and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." So here's what Paul is not saying. He is not making a statement about Christ's atonement as if it was incomplete, as if there was something lacking, as if there was something that needed to be added to it. That's not the case. The Lord Jesus Christ paid for all the sins of all of His people, past, present and future, at the cross; and when it was done, He cried out, "It is finished!" The atonement was accomplished at the cross. This affliction, this lacking in Christ's affliction that Paul is talking about, has everything to do with the believer's union and identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go back to Acts 9 in your mind. The light shines down, and Jesus says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" So let's step back and ask a question. Was Saul specifically persecuting Christ the person, the exact person of Christ? No. So in what sense was Paul, Saul, in what sense was Saul persecuting Christ? He was persecuting those that were in Christ. He was persecuting Christ's body. He was persecuting the church. He was persecuting those that had union with the Lord Jesus Christ. And so when he says this, there is this identity between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think that we see this relationship well in John 15. Turn with me to John 15, starting in verse 18. There is a relationship between Christ and His body, that when the body is persecuted, Christ is persecuted. And so Jesus says in verse 18 of John 15, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I have said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they would keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent me." Paul was suffering as

Christ's representative, as a member of His body. He is playing his part to suffer affliction because of his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth point, "Stewardship." This is a ministry that is from God. He was made a minister. It's characterized by joy, it is characterized by suffering, and now there is stewardship. He says in verse 25, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God." That last phrase, "the preaching of the word of God," the ESV probably translates it better where it says, "was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known, to fully not only preach it, but to make it fully known."

The word "stewardship" is a house manager. It's the administration of an estate, it's an administration of a house. And when we think of this, I think our minds should go to Joseph in Egypt in Potiphar's house, how Potiphar turned over, in Genesis 39, everything to Joseph. All he knew was what he was eating. That's this stewardship, okay.

Ephesians 3 1, Paul writes, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship" – there it is again – "of God's grace which was given to me for you; by the revelation that there will be made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." The stewardship that Paul has is his responsibility in this ministry. He doesn't own it, it's not from him, it is simply on loan for a period of time to him. He is to guard it. This ministry that God has given him is stewardship; and in this stewardship Paul is responsible for the ministry.

Remember the master who left in the Gospels in Luke, and he gave his servant ten minas to do business until he comes back. He said, "Go invest this." That was his responsibility. It wasn't the servants money; that was his responsibility, that was his stewardship. So let's overlay in this stewardship, because it's all God. It all comes from God, God is the source. And let's overlay that second transparency again.

How does it apply to us? How does it apply to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas? I think there's two questions that we are faced when we are thinking of this term "stewardship." One is individual, one is collectively. The first one is individually, "What am I doing, if I'm a believer, what am I doing with the gifts that God has given me?" The gift that He has given me, the gifts that He has given you is our stewardship. Are we burying them in the ground until the Master comes again? You and I, I will have to answer for how I have used the gifts, the spiritual gifts that God has given me. This is my stewardship. You'll be asked the same question.

The second question is that last phrase: "As a church, are we seeking to preach the word of God?" or as the ESV translates it, "Are we seeking to make the word of God fully known?" That's the very thing that this church is based on. If we only do one thing at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas, if we only get one thing right, it will be to faithfully preach God's word. Everything else that we can do, while many good things, is secondary to preaching God's word. That was Paul's focus, that is our focus.

Point number two, "God's mystery," verses 26 and 27, "that is, the mystery" – the Greek word there is *mystérion*. It means something that has been hidden. It means something that has not been revealed yet. That is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to the saints, verse 27 – "to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The mystery that has been hidden to this point is Gentile salvation; but it is not Gentile salvation through Judaism, it's Gentile salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the Lord Jesus Christ became a man in His earthly ministry, if you were a Gentile and you believed, you would become a Jew, you would live as a Jew, you were a proselyte. Everything changed when the Lord Jesus Christ came, and I think that this is best understood in Acts chapter 10, so turn with me to Acts 10, this change when the Lord Jesus Christ came and the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is about Peter and Cornelius.

And I want to skip around in Acts 10 to make the point, starting in verse 9: "On the next day, as they were on their way approaching the city, Peter went up to the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky open up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean.' Again the voice came a second time to him, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'" He's not talking about food, he's talking about the Gentiles. "These things happen three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky."

Verse 24, "The following day he" - Peter - "entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius who was a Gentile, a Roman centurion, was waiting for them, and he had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am just a man.' And he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled." This is the point. "And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or visit with him. Yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.'"

Verse 34, "But opening his mouth, Peter said, 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" Verse 44, he gives his sermon, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed." These are all the Jewish believers. Remember, the church came first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles.

"They were all amazed that the Holy Spirit" - this is Gentile salvation, this is Gentile Pentecost - "because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured

out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues, exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?' And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus; and they asked him to stay for a few days."

This plan of salvation for the Gentiles has always been God's plan, but it was hidden, it just hadn't been revealed. It was waiting for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was waiting for God's timing, it was waiting for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Salvation has been opened up at this very point in history to the Gentiles, and it's been opened up to the Gentiles as Gentiles in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is us. This is the church. As Gentiles in times past, we were separated from Christ. And the mystery is that God saves Gentiles as Gentiles, and the two have become one, Jew and Gentile, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go to Ephesians 2:11. The "Uncircumcision," the Gentiles; the "Circumcision," the Jews. He says in verse 12, "Remember that you were at times separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus," that is always Paul's point. "But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, making two into one man, thus establishing peace."

Point number three, "God's message." Verse 28, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete, or mature, in Christ." Paul had one message. It was a singular message. it was a focused message; and this message has four parts. The first is that he proclaimed, or he preached, Christ. Paul says, "We proclaim Him, we preach Him, we declare Him."

He goes to the Corinthian church and he says in 1 Corinthians 2, "When I came to you brothers and sisters, I did not come as someone superior in

speaking ability or wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God." And here's his message: "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

So the first point of this is the proclaiming, or the preaching. He goes to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20. He's marching to Jerusalem. He's been told that chains await him, and he tells them - it's in Acts 20 - that he is innocent of the blood of all people, and he tells them the reason that he is innocent of the blood of all people is that he did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Paul's message was to proclaim Christ, it was to preach Christ, and it was to preach him in total. He said, "I taught you the whole word of God." It's Paul's charge to Timothy, "I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is Judge of living in the dead, and by His appearing in His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." "Preach the word" was the most - Paul's dying, and the ministry - his spiritual son is Timothy, and the most important thing that he can tell Timothy is, "Preach the word," because he knows in the word, preach Christ. He knows it's the gospel. He knows that it's the power of God for salvation.

Again, I want to overlay that second transparency. Trinity Bible Church, why do we emphasize God's word? Why do we give away free Bibles? Why do we preach verse by verse? When you preach verse by verse you're forced to deal with the full counsel of God. You're not picking and choosing what you want to talk about. That's the most important thing. Why do we do it? It's Romans 10:14-17. It's how God draws His people to Himself: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing of the word of Christ."

I've asked this question before. I'm going to continue to ask this question as a church, as individuals of this church. If we do not preach God's word, if we do not study it, if we do not seek to explain it, if we do not share Christ with the lost, my question to you is this: "Who will? Who will?" Isn't that what we've been called to do, to witness to the lost? Isn't that how we are called to live our lives? Isn't that why God has given us individually spiritual gifts to build up His kingdom through the sharing of Christ?

This is where it gets difficult. Do you believe in the sufficiency of the Scripture? Do you believe that in it is the power of God for salvation? Do you really understand that? Do you know what you are saying when you say that you believe that the Scriptures are sufficient?

There are two things that sadden me as an elder of this church. One, when someone does not think that the Scriptures are sufficient, that we need something else. And the second thing – and this is where it gets personal and sharp – we have people in this church that only come on Sunday morning when Steve Lawson is preaching. Don't get me wrong; I love Steve Lawson. I have personally listened to every message that he has ever preached here. If he was here right now, I would sit down so he could finish this sermon.

But my question is, if we believe in the sufficiency of the Scriptures, are we following a man or are we following the man, the Lord Jesus Christ? The power is in God's word, it's not in the preacher. The power is in God's word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God changes His people. We do His bidding, but God changes His people through His word and through His Spirit. I'm not worried about offending anybody this morning, because the people that I would offend, they're not here.

You know, there's something that to continue this theme of examining, "Do we believe in the sufficiency of the Scripture?" if the apostle Paul was here this morning preaching at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas, would we be here? I don't know. He wasn't popular. He didn't have a bunch of followers. You know, what's interesting is the Corinthians said this about him, it's 2 Corinthians 10:10, "For they say, 'His' – Paul's – 'letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.'" The power was not with Paul, the power is that Paul was being used of God. Salvation is of the Lord.

"The purpose of the message," verses 28 and 29. There's a negative and a positive to proclaiming Christ. There's an admonishing, there's a warning,

there's a reproof, there's a correction of error; and then the positive is teaching and instructing a disciple, instructing a pupil. The goal, the purpose of admonishing and teaching is that every Christian would be complete in the manner that they would be mature, more mature in their faith, mature in Christ.

Philippians 3. Turn with me to Philippians 3. Paul writes this of himself; and I think if we're honest, we would hope to be where Paul is. Verse 12, Philippians 3:12, "Not that I, Paul, have already grasped it, or have already become perfect," - meaning mature - "but I press on if I may take hold of that for which I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus." I love that. He's been taken hold of for Christ Jesus.

"Brothers and sisters," - verse 13 - "I do not regard myself as having taken hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." That is what we're to do. That's why we preach exegetically; we want to teach the full counsel of God, we want there to be a wisdom. Next Sunday Dr Lawson's going to get to this.

Couple verses in Colossians 2. Why do we preach Christ? Why do we seek to teach the full counsel of God? So that we could become mature. What does Paul say? "Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He says, "I labor for this purpose, to present every man complete and mature in Christ," okay.

Third point, "Striving for this message." Paul says, "I labor, striving according to His power." This word "strives" is *agōnizomai* in the Greek. It means to struggle. It pictures wrestling with somebody. There is pain and toil. It's long, it's agonizing in effort. And this describes Paul's effort for this message. This is Paul's responsibility. It's the responsibility that we all have to fulfill what God has called us to do.



There is a striving, but then there's something behind this striving. Verse 29, that's the fourth point: power of this message, "striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." The real power behind Paul's striving for the message of God is God Himself. God is the power. He is the source of all power, He's the one that provides the power to His people. God is the one who saves. He's the one that is active in the growth and sanctification of the people; and Paul knew that. Paul knew that behind his efforts is God's power. Again, this is a point where we see touching the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. It's what he would write to the Philippians where he said, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." That's our responsibility. Live it out. Do what He's called you to do.

And how does he finished the verse? "for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure." That's the sovereignty of God. That's the engine, that's the power behind the ministry. This is God's model for the ministry. This is what we strive for at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas. And our prayer is that the Lord would keep us on this path, that He would help us in this endeavor.