

We Proclaim Him

The Scope, Strain, and Strength of Discipleship

Colossians 1:28–29

© Mike Riccardi

Introduction

Well we come this morning to the fourth and final message in our four-part series on discipleship that I began at the beginning of last month. Our text has been Colossians 1:28–29—a short passage which encapsulates the Apostle Paul’s philosophy of ministry. And we’ve said that Paul’s philosophy of ministry should be our philosophy of ministry. We want to carry out the ministry of the Apostolic Gospel according to Apostolic prescriptions.

And we’ve found that Paul’s philosophy of ministry centers on discipleship. And I’ve submitted to you that in these two brief verses, we find **five elements of Christian discipleship** that are designed to equip us, as Christ’s Church, to faithfully engage in the work of the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations. Let me read that text, once again, to begin our time. Colossians chapter 1, verses 28 and 29. Paul writes, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

And as I’ve said, these two verses give us **five elements of Christian discipleship**. And so far, we have devoted three messages to the first two elements, which I’ve dubbed the **scheme** and the **substance** of discipleship. And I’ll briefly review those once again.

Review I: The Scheme of Discipleship (v. 28c–29a)

We find **the scheme** of discipleship at the end of verse 28 into the first part of verse 29. Paul says, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that* we may present every man complete in Christ. *For this purpose* also I labor . . .” The goal, the purpose, the aim of discipleship is to see each and every believer who belongs to Jesus Christ grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, to become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ in sanctification, so that they will finally be brought to perfection in Christ as they stand before Him as a redeemed and purified Bride, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and blameless, such as the Lord Jesus is worthy of.

Jesus said, in Matthew 10:25, that “It is enough for the disciple that he *become like* his teacher.” And that really is what discipleship is. It is the process by which the people of Jesus become like Jesus. And particularly, it’s how our brothers and sisters in Christ can come alongside one another and aid one another in becoming like Jesus. Discipleship is fellow Christians helping one another to follow Jesus more faithfully.

Christians who are concerned to be faithful to Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations are not content with getting people to profess faith in Christ and then live lukewarm spiritual lives for the next 30 years. They’re not satisfied with a big church full of people who remain ignorant of the Scriptures and the great doctrines of the faith, who remain spiritually weak and uncommitted. Discipleship means we don’t just care about getting people through the door of Christianity, so that they eke into heaven by the skin of their teeth. No, it means we care about spiritual and theological maturity, and long with Paul to present every believer *complete* in Christ.

Review II: The Substance of Discipleship (v. 28a)

Then, having seen the scheme, we examined the **substance** of discipleship. How do we work toward presenting every Christian complete in Christ? Paul answers at the beginning of verse 28: “We proclaim Him.” The very sum and **substance** of Christian discipleship is the proclamation of Christ to one another, because when Christ is proclaimed, His glory is displayed. And 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that believers are transformed into the image of Christ as they behold the beauty of His glory. The heart and soul of all the ministry that takes place in a local church must be, “We proclaim Him!”

We become what we behold. And when we proclaim Christ to one another, we hold up the beauty of His glory for His saints to behold. That is how the body of Christ will be built up and edified and brought to maturity.

Review: Admonishing and Teaching

But we also observed that the sentence doesn’t *end* with “We proclaim Him.” Paul says the proclamation of Christ to one another breaks down into **two main functions**. He says, “We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and *teaching* every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” The **substance** of discipleship—the proclamation of Christ—is carried out through the ministry of admonition and the ministry of teaching.

And so we devoted a second sermon to Scripture’s teaching concerning the ministry of admonition. We focused on how the Lord commands His people to give, receive, and even invite admonition. And we concluded that rather than fearing correction, and taking offense at

correction, and dismissing correction as legalism and judgmentalism, we ought to humbly receive and even invite correction from our fellow believers. And rather than fearing the offense that'll be taken by the correction we might give, we ought to love one another enough not to shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable to one another. Because, as we also saw, the purpose of giving, receiving, and inviting admonition is that it would be an instrument in the Lord's discipline whereby He makes us to share in His holiness—the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Friends, we do not come into the Christian life perfected in every sense. The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account, and, as regards our position, we are seated in the heavenly places with Christ. But as regards our practice, we are yet sinners who battle with remaining sin in our flesh. And so we have to always be bringing our practice into conformity with our position, always fighting to live as we have been re-created to be. As brothers and sisters, we need each other to expose the sins in our lives that we can't see for ourselves, and we need to be eager to have those sins exposed in our own lives so that we might be made fit to see the Lord. A key feature of genuine Christian discipleship is the ministry of admonition.

And then, in a third sermon we considered how the ministry of teaching is absolutely indispensable to discipleship. And that creates three responsibilities for us as believers committed to discipleship. We are to teach one another to **know the truth**. We need to gird up the loins of our minds and devote ourselves to the careful study of the Scriptures, and thereby to arrive at sound doctrine. We need to love the Lord our God with all our minds, so that our minds will not be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. We need to recognize, as John MacArthur has said, that careful thinking is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith, and thus we must devote ourselves to being good students of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must also teach one another to **love the truth** that we know. We cannot be content with intellectual notions that do not affect our hearts. We must not be satisfied with only *seeing* God's glory; we must *rejoice* in it. We must delight in it! And if our hearts are dull and backward, so that our affections for God and His truth don't catch up to our knowledge of God and His truth, we need to go to work on our hearts, and tune our hearts to sing His grace. We cannot merely analyze and assess; we must admire and adore. More than mere students, we must be worshipers.

And finally, we must teach one another to **practice** the truth. In teaching one another to obey all that Christ commanded, we need to live life alongside one another—our lives as open books before our brothers and sisters—so that they can see and observe how we navigate the Christian life. We need to observe faithfulness in the lives of saints more mature than us, and we need to model faithfulness to saints less mature than us. This is the **substance** of discipleship. “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching.”

III. The Scope of Discipleship (v. 28)

And so that brings us, this morning, to the **third element of discipleship** that we glean from Colossians 1:28–29. In addition to the scheme of discipleship, and the substance of discipleship, we have, **number three**, the **scope** of discipleship. To whom in the local church does the responsibility of discipleship extend? Which members of the body of Christ are within the purview of discipleship? Look again at verse 28. “We proclaim Him, admonishing *every* man and teaching *every* man with all wisdom, so that we may present *every* man complete in Christ.”

No one is excepted. The **scope** of discipleship is universal with respect to Christ’s church. If you’re a Christian, you’re a disciple. And therefore, you are responsible to ensure that you are *being* disciplined, and your spiritual leaders are going to be held accountable by Christ for how they have disciplined you. Some people in the church hear of the responsibilities that are implied in discipleship—of proclaiming Christ, of giving, receiving, and inviting admonition, of knowing the truth, loving the truth, and practicing the truth—and they think, “Well yeah, I mean, that’s what Scripture talks about for those really committed Christians—the really spiritual ones who read their Bibles and pray every day, who speak up in Bible study, and maybe who hold some sort of office in the church. But I’m just a regular, normal guy. I mean, yeah, I’m a Christian, but that’s like a whole different level.” No! Nothing could be further from the truth! We are to admonish *every* man! We are to teach *every* man, so that we may present *every* man complete in Christ!

The repetition is emphatic. One commentator says, “This verse is remarkable for its emphasis on universality” (Moo, 159). And it’s true. The Greek word *pas*, which means “every” or “all,” occurs four times in this single verse. And you just can’t escape the intended stress: *every* man, *every* man, *every* man. Now, I think we tend to hear that emphasis on universality within the church, and our instinct is to feel burdened by that responsibility—as if Paul’s intent is that no one can escape the scope of his discipleship ministry even if they wanted to! But what’s interesting is, in the original historical context in which Paul wrote this, he intended this to be a declaration not of responsibility, but of privilege.

You see, the churches of Colosse and Laodicea had been assaulted with the false doctrine of a group of teachers that we might call “proto-Gnostics.” Full-blown Gnosticism was later development, but a similar philosophy had already been making the rounds in the Greco-Roman world by the middle of the first century. The word “Gnosticism” comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which is the word for knowledge. And what characterizes these Gnostic groups is the belief that there was a special spiritual wisdom or secret knowledge that was only revealed to a select few. There was some ecstatic religious experience—some indoctrination or initiation—that was only enjoyed by the elite, and the rest of the uninitiated were dependent upon these super-spiritual types for any hope of growth and maturity.

But against that background, Paul says he admonishes *every* believer and teaches *every* believer, so that he might present *every* believer complete in Christ. One commentator captures it well. He says, “Certain teachers professed a form of ‘wisdom’ higher than anything taught by Paul and his colleagues, a form of wisdom which not everyone could appreciate, and which therefore marked off those who accepted it and affected its jargon as intellectually superior to others. On the contrary, say Paul and Timothy, in the proclamation of Christ we bring all wisdom within the reach of all, and our purpose is to present each believer before the face of God in a state of complete spiritual maturity. There should be no exceptions; there are no heights in Christian attainment which are not within the reach of all, by the power of heavenly grace” (Bruce, 87). And actually, we should note that Paul says more than, “We admonish *all* believers and teach *all* believers.” He uses the singular, which you could translate as “each man.” He uses the singular to show that each person individually was the special object of his shepherding care (cf. O’Brien, 88). He says something similar in 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 11 and 12, where he speaks of his ministry among the believers in Thessalonica. He says, “You know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring *each one of you* as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

And so, so far from a burdensome responsibility, this universal **scope** of discipleship within the Church of Christ is regarded as the highest of privileges. No Christian is excluded from the pastoral care of discipleship in the local church. This ministry unto maturity and growth and sanctification and greater knowledge of Christ is available to each believer in Jesus. But that doesn’t in any way undermine the fact that with that great privilege comes responsibility—that just as you fall within the scope of the *beneficiaries* of discipleship, you also must consider yourself a *benefactor* in discipleship, as you not only receive admonition and instruction, but as you admonish each one and teach each one so that you can help present each one complete in Christ. That responsibility of aiding in the sanctification of the Church—of laboring for the purity of Christ’s Bride—does not belong to an elite few, but to each and every member of the body of Christ.

Let’s look at this from another couple of passages. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. This is that great chapter where Paul is giving instruction concerning spiritual gifts in the church. And he says, starting in verse 4, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; varieties of ministries, and the same Lord; varieties of effects, but the same God who works all in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” To each individual believer, God gives these varying spiritual gifts *for the common good*. As each member uses their gifts, the church as a whole is blessed.

Skip down to verse 18. He says, “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there

are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” You see, God has given each member in the local church a certain function that that member can perform especially well. And without that member doing its part, Paul asks: “Where would the body be?” What would happen? It’s almost unthinkable. The eye can’t say it doesn’t need the hand! The head can’t say it doesn’t need the feet! Brothers and sisters: we need one another! We need to benefit from each member’s unique spiritual gifts. And so we need to be devoted to serving one another, so that each one might be presented perfect in Christ.

Now turn to Ephesians chapter 4. Paul has just spent the first three chapters of his letter instructing the Ephesians concerning the privileges of being a Christian—about who God has called them to be in Christ. And in chapter 4 he turns to exhort them to live consistently with that identity—that they should match their high calling with high conduct. And beginning in verse 7, he begins teaching about how that holy conduct is going to happen in the church—namely, as each member exercises the spiritual gifts God gives them. Let’s start in verse 11. Paul writes, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,”—there are the gifts. Now what for what *purpose* does He give those spiritual gifts? Verse 12: “...for the equipping of the saints for the work of [ministry], to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,”—now listen to this, verse 16—“from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together *by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part*, causes the *growth* of the body for the *building up* of itself in love.”

What a text! How is the body going to grow and be built up? How are we going to attain to the unity of the faith, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ? When *each individual part* of the body is working properly, unto the common good of the whole. When each individual member is using the spiritual gifts that God has given him or her, so that they might present every believer perfect in Christ. You see, friends: this discipleship—this sanctification—is a community project. The **scope** of discipleship extends to each member of Christ’s Church.

And so you have to ask yourself, “Am I investing in the body?! Am I being a good steward of the gifts that God has given me by employing them to bless and edify my brothers and sisters in the local body of believers that Christ has called me to be in? Am I committed to the ministry of discipleship in and through my local church? Am I attending a home Bible study? And if I’m attending, am I faithfully investing in the people in my Bible study? Am I cultivating biblical

friendships and genuine fellowship with my brothers and sisters there? Are we sharing meals together? Are we opening our homes to one another? Are we living life alongside one another? Are we confronting sin in one another? Are we sharpening one another in the process of sanctification?” And dear friends, if you’re not, what are you going to do about it? The responsibility of discipleship falls to every man.

The scheme of discipleship is to present every believer complete in Christ. The substance of discipleship is to proclaim Christ by admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom. And the **scope** of discipleship extends to each individual Christian—each individual member of the body of Christ. There are no exceptions. You are either in the discipleship process—both being discipled and discipling others, or you are disobedient.

IV. The Strain of Discipleship

Well that brings us to the **fourth element of discipleship** that we find in this text. And that is, **number four**, the **strain** of discipleship. Discipleship takes work! And we see that in two key words in verse 29. Paul says, “For this purpose also I *labor*, *striving* according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

Labor and striving. The word “labor” is translated from the Greek word *kopiaō*. And *kopiaō* is the verb form of the noun *kopos*, which means “a blow” or “a beating.” So *kopiaō* signified working to the point of weariness and exhaustion as if one had been repeatedly beaten. And we say that even in English, don’t we? We work hard, and then we stand up straight, wipe our brow, exhale and say, “Phew! I’m beat!” That’s this word. One commentator remarked, “It was the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion, or heat. ... It denoted severe labor. The emphasis is on the great effort expended by one who labors unceasingly for the congregation’s welfare” (O’Brien, 90).

And Paul often referred to his ministry this way. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, he says the grace of God in his calling to Gospel ministry didn’t prove vain. “But,” he says, “I *labored* even more than all of them.” In Galatians 4:11, when he expresses his concerns about the Galatian believers’ tolerance of heresy, he says he fears he had *labored* over them in vain. His ministry among them was labor! And there’s one text that illustrates this point so well that I want to offer an extended comment on it. So turn with me to Philippians chapter 2. There, Paul is calling the Philippians to maintain Christian holiness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He exhorts them, verse 16, to “hold fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor *toil* in vain.” And there’s our word, *kopiaō*: toil. “But,” verse 17, “even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.” And I think this beautifully weds the concepts of

the **strain** of discipleship and self-sacrifice in ministry, by putting the word *kopiaō*, toil, alongside the word picture of the drink offering.

Paul says that the entirety of his life of ministry, in which he has been running and toiling and laboring for, Philippians 1:25, the progress and joy of the Philippians' faith—all of his labors in the ministry are like the labors of a priest endeavoring to offer a holy sacrifice to God. And the drink offering was what was poured out on an Old Testament sacrifice to complete it. As Paul waits in prison to find out whether or not Nero will sentence him to execution, he says that if indeed this sacrificial ministry will end in his martyrdom, he will rejoice—because his death in the service of Christ and for the sake of the Philippians' progress in holiness will be to him the drink offering that completes the sacrificial offering of His ministry. He'll rejoice; because his martyrdom would be a fitting climax to all of his apostolic labors. It's as if he says, "Oh my dear Philippians, if the Lord has decreed that my life be poured out as the drink offering that seals and sanctifies the offering of your holy living, so that you become an acceptable sacrifice unto God, I'm not made sorrowful by my death! I rejoice! My life could not be better spent—it could not be better sacrificed—than in the cause of your holiness, which abounds to the glory of God!"

And you can't detect a hint of backwardness in those words. Paul's attitude in this toilsome labor of the priestly ministry of the Gospel is not one of begrudging obedience and miserable duty. He is rejoicing. He is saying, "If my blood must be spilled so that God will get what He is worthy of in your lives, then—in the language of 2 Corinthians 12:15—I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. What greater privilege can there be to lay down my life to ensure that the Lord receive the pure Bride He deserves!" This is the **strain** of discipleship.

But we must remember: Paul was not only willing to die once for his ministry of the Gospel to the Gentiles. This laying down of his life was not merely surrendering himself to death. Paul was willing to die daily for the sake of the growth of the people of God. That's precisely what he says in 1 Corinthians 15:31: "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die *daily*." Romans 8:36: "For your sakes we are being put to death *all day long*; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 2 Corinthians 4:11: "For we who live are *constantly* being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake. ... So death works in us, but life in you!" I'm sure there were mornings when Paul asked himself if it was all worth it! But if he ever felt like giving up, even for a split-second, he remembered that the joy to be had in fellowship with Christ as a sharer of His sufferings was so satisfying, that he joyfully took up his cross daily, died to himself daily, and followed the Savior.

And friends, this is the kind of joyful self-denial that must characterize your life! You need to wake up every morning and bring your mind into subjection under the Word of God. And you must make a conscious decision by the grace of God and because of the delightfulness of the glory of Christ that you are going to die to yourself for the sake of following after Jesus and

serving His people. That you are going to lay yourself on the altar, and, by the mercies of God, to present your body and your mind and your time and your energy as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, Romans 12:1. Your lives are to be a living martyrdom—a continual crucifixion of your own comforts and preferences—so that the laying down of your lives is not necessarily dying for one another, but living for one another. This itself is Jesus’ call to discipleship. Luke 9:23: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” And so if you’re going to be a disciple, you must be actively engaged in the **strain** of making disciples.

But Paul doesn’t only labor. He also strives. “For this purpose also I labor, *striving*.” And “striving” translates the verb *agonizomai*, from which we get the word *agony*, and *agonize*. It means “to fight,” “to struggle,” and “to engage in a physical conflict in which weapons were used.” It’s the word used for “fighting” in John 18:36, where Jesus says if His kingdom were of this world His servants would be fighting. That’s military conflict! The word also often has the connotation of engaging in an athletic contest. It’s used that way in 1 Corinthians 9:25, where Paul says, “Everyone who *competes in the games* [*agonizomai*] exercises self-control in all things.” *Agonizomai* has the implication, as one commentator said, “of giving oneself in the utmost effort, with all the self-discipline required to achieve this goal” (Dunn, 126).

And that imagery of the athletic contest in 1 Corinthians 9:25 sparks an interesting point. Again, Paul says, “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a *perishable wreath*, but we an imperishable.” The wreath refers to that crown of laurels that was placed on the victor’s head as he stood on the platform to receive his prize. Well, throughout the New Testament, the Apostles take that image of the wreath and use it as a metaphor for the believer’s final reward in the day of Christ Jesus. Paul calls it the crown of *righteousness* in 2 Timothy 4:8. James calls it the crown of *life* in James 1:12. Peter calls it the unfading crown of *glory* in 1 Peter 5:4. This is our heavenly reward.

But in two passages of the New Testament Paul calls the believers whom he had labored and agonized over his crown. In Philippians 4:1, he calls those precious brothers and sisters, “My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and *crown*.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20, he says to the believers in that church, “For who is our hope or joy or *crown of exultation*? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy!” Paul is saying that his great reward—the crown of laurels on his head, the proof of his victory in this athletic contest that is the **strain** of discipleship, the very ground of his glory and joy in the presence of Christ at His coming—is the spiritual maturity of the believers he’s invested in. They themselves, in the progress of their holiness, will be his crown.

This is precisely what he said in Philippians 2:16 that we looked at a moment ago: he wants them to stand out as stars shining in the night sky, “so that in the day of Christ I will have reason

to *glory*”—to rejoice—“because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” Do you hear it? “If you continue in the path of obedience, so that Christ is formed in you to the extent that you shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, when the Lord Jesus comes, I will not be found as one who ran but was not crowned—as one who has nothing to show for all my endeavors but sore muscles! Oh, if you Philippians continue to be monuments of the power of the Gospel in practical holiness, in the last day I’ll wear the victor’s crown as a minister who was used to realize the great end of the ministry!” (Martin).

And my friends, we need to have this very same view of one another—that our fellow believers are our joy and crown of exultation on the day of Christ. Now sure, we are not each other’s pastors and spiritual leaders like Paul was to the Philippians and the Thessalonians. But we are all called to the ministry of discipleship. We are all called to be laboring diligently to aid in the sanctification of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord has given you to the members of GraceLife—and He has given the members of GraceLife to you—so that we might encourage one another, and sharpen one another, and stir one another up to greater likeness to Christ—to greater hatred of sin, and greater love for righteousness. He has given us to one another to get into each other’s kitchen, to ask the hard questions, to give of our time and energy, to be devoted to one another in prayer, to model for one another how to put off sin and put on righteousness, and ten thousand other things.

Alexander MacLaren, that great Scottish preacher, said that “the crown of victory laid on the locks of a faithful teacher is the character of those whom he has taught.” And I would broaden that out to apply it to all of us: the crown of victory laid on the locks of a faithful *believer* is the character of those brothers and sisters whom the Lord brought into his life, whom he poured himself into, and whom he labored to see mature in holiness.

Dear friends, are you investing your lives in the lives of your fellow believers, so that in the day of Christ you will have a number of brothers and sisters who will be your joy and crown of exultation? If not, then before you leave the Family Center this morning—with the thought of that glorious day of Christ in the horizon of your mind—you need to ask yourself what you’re going to do to change that. What in your life will you sacrifice in order to invest in your crown? How can you more faithfully give yourself to spending and being spent for the souls of your brothers and sisters? At the bare minimum, that means getting involved in a Bible study, so that you can surround yourself with these kinds of relationships in that small-group setting. It’s making time in your schedule to meet with that brother or sister in your life for personal discipleship. It’s opening your home to your fellow believers and forging true friendships and relationships in a true, life-on-life context.

Friends, whatever you do, don’t forfeit your crown of exultation. Give yourself to the **strain** of discipleship.

V. The Strength of Discipleship

“But Mike, where am I going to find the strength for that? I mean, laboring unto exhaustion! Laying my life down in a living martyrdom! Dying daily! Agonizing in sacrificial service for the church! Mike, I know myself! I know the sluggishness and the backwardness of my own heart! Where am I going to get the resources—the motivation, the fuel—for this kind of sacrificial lifestyle?” The answer comes in the **fifth element of discipleship** that we find in this text. We’ve seen the scheme, the substance, the scope, the strain, and now we come, **number five**, to the **strength** of discipleship. Look with me again at verse 29: “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to *His* power, which mightily works within me.” The **strength** of discipleship is the almighty power of God’s grace at work within you.

This truth totally dominated all of Paul’s thinking and all of Paul’s practice. This reality of intense, disciplined human effort, energized by omnipotent divine power. Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” “I live; yet not I, but *Christ* lives in me.” 1 Corinthians 15:10: “I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” *I* labored! And yet in real sense it wasn’t ultimately me. It was the grace of God working *in* me! The famous Philippians 2:12–13: “*Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you*, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” And 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11: “As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves, as one who is *serving by the strength which God supplies*; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” We serve. We toil. We labor. We strain. *By the strength* which God supplies.

And Paul is absolutely emphatic, here. Note the triple emphasis on God’s strength at work in him. “Striving according to (1) His *power*, which (2) *mightily* (3) *works* within me.” Those are three occurrences of two Greek words: *dunamis*, which is the word used for “power” and “mightily.” It’s where we get the words *dynamic*, and *dynamism*. And *energeō*, from which we get the word *energy*. This is the dynamic energy of Almighty God that is at work in our souls to **strengthen** us for this work that He’s called us to!

In Ephesians 3:14, Paul tells the Colossians how he prays for them. He prays that they would be “*strengthened with all power*, according to His glorious *might*, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.” He prays the same thing for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14–16. He says, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be

strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” And he closes in verses 20 and 21 with that wonderful benediction: “Now to Him who is *able* to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the *power* that *works* within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

But what’s *most* striking is how often these two words—*dunamis* and *energeō*—appear with reference to the resurrection of Christ. In Colossians 2:12, Paul likens our conversion to a spiritual resurrection and says, “You were raised up with [Christ] through faith in the *energeia* of God”—the energizing power of God—“who raised Him from the dead.” In Philippians 3:21, Paul speaks of our glorification as that event when Christ “will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, *by the exertion of the power* that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” And it is by virtue of His resurrection that He has ascended to heaven and has been seated at the right hand of the Father. And in addition to our conversion and our glorification, the resurrection power is at work in us everywhere in between, in sanctification. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians chapter 1 makes this clear. Starting in verse 18, he prays, “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the *strength of His might* which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Friends, this means that the power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the Father is that very same energizing power that is mightily at work within us, supplying us the **strength** we need to serve the church in discipleship. We have resurrection power fueling us, so that even when the flesh is weak, Almighty God makes our spirit willing. Even though the outer man is decaying, yet resurrection power renews our inner man day by day. That means it simply falls to us to trust and obey—to trust the promise of this divine power, and to obey the call to labor and strive in proclaiming Christ, admonishing every man, and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we might present every man complete in Christ.

Conclusion

{Refer to audio for Gospel presentation}

Brothers and sisters—fellow disciples of the Lord Jesus—let us live as disciples. Let us be disciple-making disciples, because, I assure you, there is no other kind of genuine disciple of Christ. Preach Christ. Admonish one another. Receive admonition. Know the truth, love the truth, and practice the truth. And teach others the same. And not just some, but every Christian

the Lord has given you in the local church. Labor and agonize over it. Give yourself to one another. Be absorbed in these things, because the sovereign power of the Triune God is mightily at work within you.