

A MINISTER WHO WILL TIRELESSLY LABOUR FOR THE CHURCH

COLOSSIANS 01:24–29

Introduction

One of the most basic needs of the church is to have a minister who arduously labours for the church.

- I. A minister who will willingly suffer for the church (v. 24).
- II. A minister who has been chosen by God to proclaim the Word of God (v. 25).
- III. A minister who will share the great mystery of God – “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (vv. 26-27).
- IV. A minister who will preach Christ and will warn and teach every man (v. 28).
- V. A minister who will labour and work – strive laboriously, depending upon Christ for energy (v. 29).

I. *Colossians 01:24 Minister’s Willingness to Suffer*

The church needs a minister (servant) who will willingly suffer for others, that is, for the church, the body of Christ. Paul was such a minister. He paid any price and went to any length of suffering in order to reach and grow people for Christ. He literally poured out his life: he suffered much, and the suffering he bore, he bore willingly for the cause of Christ and His church. This is the message of this verse. It teaches a most wonderful thing: the minister of God actually *completes the sufferings of Christ*. When Christ was upon the earth, He loved the church and gave Himself for it; therefore, He poured out His heart and life for the church, that is, for believers. Christ ministered, served, worked, laboured – and He did it all laboriously. Every day of His life He suffered to the point of exhaustion and fatigue, striving to reach and minister to people. Christ bore whatever was necessary in order to build up the church. And in so doing He left the *pattern* for all those who would follow after Him. When He left the earth, He expected all believers to *follow in His steps*, to give their lives to suffer whatever is necessary to reach and minister to people. Christ expects every minister and believer to suffer for the church: to complete the church, to bring it to its full measure; to fill it up to the fullness of His will. He expects us to pay whatever price is necessary to build the church. He expects us...

- to fill up whatever sufferings of pain, sacrifice, fatigue and exhaustion are lacking.

Working and labouring for Christ on this earth are not easy. Serving the church in this world is not easy. The reason is due to the ideas and behaviour of men toward Christ and His church. Men’s ideas and behaviour are corrupt. They look at Christ and His church and feel...

- that the church is meaningless for modern man.
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- that the church is acceptable just so it stays in its place.
- that the church is all right as a social service to the community.
- that the church is needed to lift high the volumes of morality and justice.
- that the church is good in that it meets the religious needs of man.

The list could go on and on, for the feelings of people about Christ and the church are almost endless. Some persons look at Christ and deny His relevance and curse His name. They could care less about His church. When it comes to the church, they...

- ignore it
- persecute it
- ridicule it
- abuse it
- neglect it
- attempt to destroy it

Other persons profess Christ and join His church, but their commitment is almost meaningless. They are...

- inactive
- non-supportive
- unconcerned
- complacent
- sleepy-eyed
- lacking vision

On top of all this, there are always those within the church who are...

- worldly
- fleshly
- critical
- gossiping
- murmuring
- making trouble
- carnal
- divisive
- whispering
- criticizing

It is such ideas and behaviour that puts so much pressure and weight upon the leaders of the church. This is what causes so much suffering for the genuine servant of Christ. The genuine servant longs for people to know Christ and the abundance of life which Christ brings. He wants people to grow into the image of Christ and to keep their eyes fixed upon the hope of glory which is to be given to every true believer. He knows that without Christ men are lost and doomed to judgment. Therefore, he suffers whatever burden and pain is necessary to reach and grow people.

John 15:20 “Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”

Phil 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

2 Tim 3:10-12 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Heb 12:3-4 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

II. *Colossians 01:25 Minister Chosen by God*

The church needs a minister who has been chosen by God to proclaim the Word of God. Note two significant points.

1. Paul was made a minister by God. Paul was a minister because God had called him to be a minister. He was not in the ministry...
 - because he thought the ministry was a good profession to enter
 - because some friends thought he would make a good minister
 - because he had the natural talents for the ministry
 - because he wanted to commit his life to teach the highest principles of morality and justice

Note a most significant fact. The word *commission* (oikonomian) refers to the steward who oversees the household and property of the owner. The minister is the steward of God, the person chosen to oversee the house or church of God. This fact is almost unbelievable, but it is true: God has actually chosen some persons to oversee His affairs for Him. The minister has actually been chosen by God to be the steward of His world and church and people. God has literally taken His church and people and placed them into the hands of His ministers, into...

- their stewardship
- their management
- their supervision
- their care
- their administration
- their lives
- their ministry
- their love
- their responsibility

What an enormous call and responsibility, yet it comes from God; therefore, it must be fulfilled.

1 Cor 9:16-17 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

Col 1:25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

1 Th 2:4-5 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness.

2 Th 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.

1 Tim 1:11-12 That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Titus 1:3 *And at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.*

2. Paul was chosen to fulfil the Word of God, that is, to make the Word of God fully known.
=> Robertson says the minister is to “to give full scope to the Word of God” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4, p. 484).
=> Griffith Thomas says the minister is to complete “the message of God’s grace,” that he is to “put his whole soul into...the divine gospel entrusted to him” (*Studies in Colossians and Philemon*).
=> Herbert Carson says the minister’s task is to “fill out...the *Word of God*, by declaring...the gospel” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*. “Tyndale Bible Commentaries,” ed. by RVG Tasker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1960, p. 52).
=> Marvin Vincent says the minister is to “fully discharge [his office...in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles no less than to the Jews” (*Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol.3. Grand Rapids. MI. Eerdmans, 1946, p. 478).
=> Wuest quotes Lightfoot as saying the minister is “to preach fully, to give...complete development to the Word” (*Ephesians and Colossians*. Vol. 1, p. 192).
=> Mathew Henry simply says, “We are Christ’s ministers for the good of His people, to ‘fulfil the Word of God’ (that is...to preach it)” (*Mathew Henry’s Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 754).

Mat 10:7 *“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’”*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

Acts 5:20 *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”*

2 Th 3:1 *Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*

III. Colossians 01:26–27 Indwelling Presence of Christ in You

The church needs a minister who will share the great mystery of God – the glorious message of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” What does this mean? Remember that the word “mystery” means secret, some secret that God was not able to reveal to the world until man had been prepared to receive it. What is the mystery that God has kept secret, but now has been revealed? It is twofold; it has two parts to its revelation.

1. First, the mystery is that Christ actually lives within the believer. It is the truth of the *Indwelling Christ* – that Christ actually lives within the hearts and lives of believers and that His presence is their guarantee of living forever in glory.

This is exactly what Christ had promised when He was on earth. He was about to face the cross, but right before He died, He said:

John 14:16-18 “*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*”

The Holy Spirit is the personal presence of Christ. Christ is within the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. (See Jn. 14:15-26.) Note three facts.

- a. Jesus said, “I will come to you.” He meant that He would return after He had gone away, that is, died. He would come back to give believers His personal presence. He would not leave them *comfortless* (orphanous); the word means to be orphaned, to be without parental help, to be helpless. Jesus would not leave them to struggle through the trials and temptations of life alone.

Jesus’ presence with His followers began with His resurrection and with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was saying that He would come to the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit.

- b. The presence of Jesus is a living, eternal presence. He died, but He did not stay dead. He arose and conquered death; He arose to live forever. Now think: if Jesus Christ is living forever and He dwells within the believer, then that means the believer lives eternally. Christ the Eternal Presence lives *within* the believer; therefore, the believer becomes eternal. He never dies. (See *Jesus Christ and Deliverance from Death*, Jn. 8:51.) The believer is made eternal by the eternal presence of Christ *within* him.

In fact, when Jesus says “I live” (Jn. 14:19), He means He lives abundantly and eternally: He lives life in all of its fullness and meaning. Therefore, by living *within* the believer, Christ imparts the same kind of life to the believer, a life that is both abundant and eternal. (See *Life*, Jn. 1:4; *Life in Jesus Christ*, Jn. 10:10; *Eternal Life*, Jn. 17:2-3.)

- c. The presence of Christ is a living union, a *mutual indwelling* between God, Christ, and the believer. “On that day” (Jn. 14:20) refers to Jesus’ resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now note: when Jesus arose from the dead, believers knew something. His claim was true in an absolute sense. Jesus really was “in” God. God is eternal, so by being “in” God, Jesus was bound to live forever; He was bound to arise from the dead.

Something else was known. All that Jesus had said was true. He was placing all believers “in” Himself and Himself “in” them; or to say it another way, when the Holy Spirit came, believers were placed “in” His Spirit and His Spirit “in” them. (See *Holy Spirit*, Acts 2:1-4.)

This is the glorious truth of “Christ in you” — of Christ actually living within the believer. It is the first part of the great mystery of God that had been hid, but is now revealed to the children of men.

John 14:20 *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”*

John 17:23 *“I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Col 1:27 *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

2. Second, the mystery of God is that Christ will live within any person, no matter who they are — God is no respecter of persons. He shows no partiality and no favouritism. This may be a shock to some people such as Jews and some religionists who feel they are special to God. But this is the proclamation of Holy Scripture. Note the exact words of this passage:

“To make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery; which is Christ in you” (v. 27).

It is *in the Gentiles* that Christ dwells: that is, He dwells within anyone who opens his heart and life to Him. When God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to die for men, God showed the world that He loves every person equally. He does not favour anyone — not one person — much less a class or nation of people. Every person can now approach God and become acceptable to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is one other thing that needs to be noted: Christ in you, *the hope of glory*. Man’s only hope of ever entering and living in glory is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must be living in the heart of a person when he dies if the person is to be allowed to enter glory. The guarantee of glory is the presence of Christ and His Spirit within the heart.

2 Cor 1:21-22 *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

Eph 1:13-14 *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.*

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

IV. Colossians 01:28 Minister's Duty: Preach Christ

The church needs a minister who will preach Christ and will warn and teach every man. This is the great task of the minister.

1. The minister is to preach Christ. This point is revolutionary, for it declares the very opposite of what man has always done. Man has always proclaimed principles, ideas, theories, positions, rules, codes, morals, laws, philosophies, institutions and religions. But this is not to be the theme of the minister's proclamation. As good and as helpful as some of these things are, they are not the task of the minister nor of God's church. The minister preaches a Person, not things, no matter how good they may be. Griffith Thomas says it well:

The theme of Christianity is not a theory, not an institution, not a book, not a set of rules, not simply a code of morals nor a system of philosophy, and not even merely a statement of truth or of principle. It is manifestly impossible...to love, to worship or to pray to a principle (Studies in Colossians and Philemon, p. 66).

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

2 Cor 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

2. The minister is to warn or admonish every man. Man must be warned, admonished: he cannot enter glory unless Christ is in him. No man is perfect; no man has enough righteousness to make himself acceptable to God. Man cannot earn or do enough righteousness to become perfect. Therefore, he shall be cast out of the presence of

God, for God is perfect and only perfection can live in God's presence. Man's only hope is Christ, for Christ alone is righteousness. Christ alone is perfect. This is critical for man, for it means that...

- man's only hope of ever becoming acceptable to God is to have Christ, His righteousness and perfection, living within his body.
- man's only hope of conquering death when he dies is to have Christ, His righteousness and perfection, living within his body.

Man must be warned, admonished: he must repent of his evil and selfishness and turn to God in trust and obedience. He must trust and obey God's only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He must surrender his life to Christ and let Christ enter and control his life, or else he will be doomed to separation from God eternally. A person cannot live a life separated and apart from God and then at death expect to enter God's presence. If a person lives a life separated and apart from God, then he will continue on separate and apart from God — continue on eternally. God has done everything He can for man in His Son, Jesus Christ. He can do no greater thing, no more than give the life of His own dear Son for the salvation of man. There is nothing else to be done. The decision is up to every man. Man must be warned — warned by the person whom God has chosen to admonish him, that is, the minister.

Eph 5:11 *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

Titus 2:5 *To be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Isa 58:1 *“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.”*

Ezek 3:18 *When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.*

Ezek 33:9 *But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.*

3. The minister is to teach every man. It is not enough to warn men. Once they have been admonished and have responded to the warning by inviting Christ into their hearts and lives, people need to be taught. They need to learn how to live and walk in Christ. Note the word “wisdom.” This means practical knowledge, knowing how to apply

and practice and live out the great teachings of Christ. The minister is to teach “with all wisdom”; that is, he is to be practical in his teaching. Theory and principles, of course, are necessary; but they must be applied to everyday life. Believers must know how to follow Christ day by day as they face the trials and temptations of life.

4. The minister has one aim: to present every man perfect in Christ. The minister is to labour and labour to *present* every person *perfect in Christ* (see Eph. 4:12-16).

Mat 5:48 “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Eph 4:13 *Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Heb 6:1 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.*

James 1:4 *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

V. *Colossians 01:29 Minister Energized by Christ*

The church needs a minister who will labour and work — strive laboriously, depending upon Christ for energy.

1. The word *labour* (kopiao) means to toil and to struggle in labour and work to the point of exhaustion, fatigue and pain. It is the picture of an athlete struggling, agonizing and pushing himself well beyond his capacity in order to achieve his objective. This is the call of God to the minister: to labour and work just as diligently as Paul and as the most dedicated athlete.
2. The word *energy* (energeia) means working and efficiency, and is only used of superhuman power that works ever so efficiently (Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Vol. 1, p. 195). In this case, it is the power of Christ that works and energizes. When the minister has gone as far as he can, Christ steps in and infuses energy and power into his body — an energy and power that works in him mightily.

Thought 1. The minister who has truly laboured to the point of exhaustion and experienced the energy and power of Christ knows how glorious the experience is. It is just tragic that there are too few who so labour and even fewer who consistently labour to the point that Christ has to step in with His energy and power. We seem to forget too easily:

=> as long as we have physical strength and energy left to labour, the energy and power of Christ are not needed.

The only way we can experience the physical energy and power of Christ is to use all of our own strength. When we are completely empty, then Christ has to step in or else

leave us and abandon us and disregard the promise of His Word. And this He will never do. Therefore, when we have no more strength to walk and labour, it is then that He infuses us with His own supernatural energy and power.

John 4:34-35 *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘F our months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”*

John 9:4 *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”*

Rom 12:11 *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.*

1 Cor 4:2 *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

2 Tim 1:6 *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*

2 Tim 4:5 *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

Prov 6:6 *Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!*

Prov 10:5 *He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.*

Eccl 9:10 *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. ■*