

**“HIM WE PROCLAIM!”:
PAUL’S MOTIVATION, MEANS, AND MANDATE FOR
MISSIONS IN COLOSSIANS 1:24–29**

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“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” (Col 1:24–29, ESV)

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Introduction¹

“Worship is the fuel and goal of missions,”² which is about making worshipping disciples of Jesus Christ from all nations. Making mature disciples happens through

¹ This article began as three messages titled “Why Missions?”, “How Missions?”, and “Now Missions!” given at the FUSION Youth Weekend at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Oct 22, 2022. I thank my doctoral research assistant Jonathan Zavodney for his significant help in accessing and assessing secondary literature for this published version.

² John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 22; cf. Joe M. Allen III, “Missions at Midwestern: Why for the Church Means for the Nations,” *MJT* 22.1 (2023): 96–113.

both reaching and teaching and stands as the principal task of the church (Matt 28:18–20; cf. Acts 1:8).³ When disciple making crosses cultures, missions is operative. Few passages in Scripture capture so well the motivation, means, and mandate for missions as Colossians 1:24–29.

The church in Antioch originally sent Paul out as a missionary (Acts 13:1–3), yet they and the Spirit were only affirming how Jesus himself had earlier set him apart as “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” and to “suffer for the sake of my name” (9:15–16). The name Jesus, meaning “Yahweh saves,” was infused with power and hope for global salvation. This name captured the content and motivating end of Paul’s mission, as he carried out what the prophet Isaiah had earlier declared would be the messianic community’s missionary cry: “Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted” (Isa 12:4).

Jesus had appointed Paul “as a servant and witness” and set him apart to help Israelites and Gentiles alike “turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16–18).⁴ Thus, Paul sought “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of [Jesus’s] name” (Rom 1:5, author’s translation).⁵

Paul had neither planted nor visited the church in Colossae (Col 1:7–8; 2:1), yet he had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and the love for the saints (1:3–4). Writing toward the end of his ministry likely from a Roman prison (ca. AD 62), he urged the church to pray “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison” (4:3). He asked them to “remember my chains” (4:18), and he clarified for them Christ’s incomparable worth and its centrality to the Christian message and life.

In Colossians 1:24–29 Paul rejoices in his sufferings and through them fills up Christ’s afflictions, for these trials provide a context to realize his calling to serve the church by making known with great toil the wealth of Christ’s glory among the

³ See Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Jonathan Leeman, “Soteriological Mission: Focusing in on the Mission of Redemption,” in *Four Views on the Church’s Mission*, ed. Jason S. Sexton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 17–62; Jonathan Leeman, *What Is the Church’s Mission?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). For further reflections on the church’s mission as testified to in Scripture, consider Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 35–72; Scott N. Callahan and Will Brooks, eds., *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 1–101; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed., vol. 53 of *NSBT* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020). Missions within Christ’s church does not capture all that is commonly associated with the *Missio Dei* (“Mission of God”), a concept that came to the fore in the 1930s; see David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary, American Society of Missiology 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 389. For a more extensive treatment of the broader category, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

⁴ On the relationship of spiritual warfare and missions, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Greater Is He: A Primer on Spiritual Warfare for Kingdom Advance,” *SBJT* 25.2 (2021): 21–55; cf. Craig Keener, “Paul and Spiritual Warfare,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 107–23.

⁵ See Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus*, After Jesus 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

Gentiles, thus fulfilling God's Word. Paul first declares his joy in sufferings (v. 24a–c) and then highlights how these distresses are, for the sake of the church, in some way completing Christ's own tribulations (1:24d–29). With respect to the latter, he clarifies the nature of his trials in relation to Christ (1:24d–g) and then notes their goal in serving the church (1:25a–29). He states the goal (1:25a), notes his divine calling as the foundation of the goal (1:24b–d), and then unpacks the means for reaching the goal (1:25e–29), which includes fulfilling God's Word (1:25e–26) by making known among the Gentiles the unparalleled riches of knowing Christ (1:27–29). Table 1 overviews the passage's flow-of-thought.

I. Paul's Joy in His Sufferings for the Sake of the Church (1:24a–c)
II. Paul's Filling up Christ's Afflictions for the Sake of the Church (1:24d–29)
A. The Nature of His Sufferings (1:24d–g)
B. The Goal of His Sufferings: To Serve the Church (1:25a–29)
1. The Statement of the Goal (1:25a)
2. The Foundation of the Goal: God's Calling (1:25b–d)
3. The Means for Reaching the Goal: Fulfilling God's Word (1:25e–29)
a. The Need to Fulfill God's Word (1:25e–26)
b. The Way to Fulfill God's Word: Proclaiming the Wealth of the Mystery's Glory among the Gentiles (1:27–29)
(1) The Content of Paul's Proclamation (1:27c–28)
(2) The Manner of Paul's Proclamation (1:29)

Table 1. An Exegetical Outline of Colossians 1:24–29

The present study carefully considers the contribution Colossians 1:24–29 makes to our understanding of the missionary task. What drove Paul to proclaim Christ in the way he did? We will consider Colossians 1:24–29 from three perspectives: Why missions? How missions? Now missions!

Motivation: Why Missions?

By asking, “Why missions?” we seek to understand the motivating forces behind Paul's missionary calling. We will consider both the spark for his zeal and the purposes that drove him.

Foundation: God Initiates Missions (Col 1:25)

The apostle opens, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known” (Col 1:24–25). God calls, God equips, and God sends Paul as a missionary. His whole ministry for the church's sake was “according to the stewardship *from God*” (1:25). God is the initiator of global missions.

“*God* so loved the world that he gave his Son” (John 3:16). “*By sending* his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.... But *God!*” (Eph 2:1–2, 4). Instead of wiping out all rebels, *God* initiated salvation, sending Jesus to save the world. *Jesus* set Saul apart as His “chosen instrument ... to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15; cf. Rom 11:13; 15:16). “*The Holy Spirit* said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2–3). Paul was “called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God ... concerning the Son” (Rom 1:1–3). Paul had a stewardship, for God had commissioned him as a missionary. As Schnabel summarizes, “Paul’s call to missionary service emphasizes God’s initiative, the encounter with Jesus, Jesus’ authority over the life of Paul, the people to whom he is sent, and the content of the message that he will proclaim.”⁶ The Triune God is the initiator of world missions.⁷

Goal 1: Missions Seeks to Fulfill God’s Word (Col 1:25–26)

Paul says, “[For the church] I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints” (Col 1:25–26). The phrase translated “to make the word of God fully known” (v. 25) clarifies the first goal of missions, and it likely means that Paul sought to fulfill or fill up God’s Word.⁸ Fulfilling God’s Word directly relates to “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints” (v. 26).⁹

Jesus’s coming sparked the fulfillment of a host of Old Testament promises.¹⁰ Indeed, Schreiner considers the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture as the basis for Paul’s mission: “Paul was privileged to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles because he lived at the turning of the ages, the era in which God’s saving promises

⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 32.

⁷ Sumney notes: “Paul’s sufferings do not benefit the church because Paul is superior, but because God has given him a task to perform.... Paul lives an extraordinary life that benefits the readers and even the whole church, but he holds this place only because God has commissioned him to fulfill this function.” Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 103. See also Wendel Sun, “Biblical Theology and World Mission,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callahan and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 67–101.

⁸ The Greek reads πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ and is best rendered “to fulfill the word of God” (NKJV) or “to complete the word of God” (NETB). Harris is probably correct that the infinitive phrase is explanatory, defining the content of Paul’s stewardship. Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 2nd ed., Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Murray J. Harris (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 68.

⁹ Cf. Bruce T. Clark, *Completing Christ’s Afflictions: Christ, Paul, and the Reconciliation of All Things*, WUNT 2/383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

¹⁰ For a study of the Old Testament promise and New Testament realization of global missions, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “By the Waters of Babylon: Global Missions from Genesis to Revelation,” *MJT* 20.2 (2021): 6–30; cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 35–57; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Question 28: What Is a Biblical Theology of Mission?,” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 273–81; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Mission,” *DNTUOT*, 546–51.

were being realized. The gospel of Christ fulfills what was written in the Old Testament Scriptures, and believers inherit the promises made to Abraham.”¹¹

For example, in Genesis, God promises Abraham that he would become “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4), but it also says that this will only happen when the single male deliverer rises who will overcome the curse, defeat God’s enemies, and bring blessing to the world. Yahweh declares to the patriarch, “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17–18). As Paul would later observe, the offspring here is singular and refers to Christ, through whom God’s blessing reaches the world (Gal 3:16, 29).¹² Similarly, the prophet Isaiah envisions Yahweh commissioning his individual royal Servant to save a remnant from both Israel and other nations: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).¹³

Yahweh made these promises in the Old Testament, but ages and generations went by before they were realized. It took Jesus’s coming and the missionary labors

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 67.

¹² While contemporary translations like the NIV, CSB, and NASB all render as a plural the pronoun associated with “seed,” the ESV rightly captures that the form is singular in the Hebrew. Moses used plural pronouns when he intended to signal that the “offspring” was a people and not a person (e.g., Gen 17:7–8), and he used singular pronouns when focusing on an individual male descendent (e.g., 3:15; 22:17). For more on this, see C. John Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48.1 (1997): 139–48; T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48.2 (1997): 363–67; Jonathan M. Cheek, “The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman: The Canonical Outworking of Genesis 3:15,” *Them* 48.1 (2023): 29–46; cf. C. John Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?,” *TynBul* 54.1 (2003): 75–86; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–48; Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 35–107; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach,” in *Five Views of Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. Andrew M. King and Brian J. Tabb (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 197–99.

¹³ Writing about Isaiah 49:3, 6, Beale rightly notes: “Here the Servant is called ‘Israel’ ... (v. 3). And his latter-day mission is ‘to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel’ (v. 6). Now, the Servant cannot be the entire nation of Israel, since the sinful nation cannot restore itself, nor can the Servant be a faithful remnant of the nation, since the remnant is still sinful, and it would be redundant to say that the remnant’s mission was to restore the remnant (with the ‘preserved ones’ refers to in v. 6). Some have identified the Servant with Isaiah the prophet, but there is no indication that he ever accomplished such a mission, especially as further elaborated on in Isa. 53, and especially since he was also still sinful (as was even the faithful remnant) and needed the healing mission explained there. Thus, the Servant in Isa. 49:3 is best understood to be an individual messianic Servant who would restore the remnant of Israel.” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 656–57; cf. G. P. Hugenberger, “The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 105–40; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Identity and Mission of the ‘Servant of the Lord,’” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 87–108; DeRouchie, “Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach,” 204–10.

of his church to fulfill them (cf. Rom 1:1–3; 16:25–26).¹⁴ Sumney notes that the language of “fulfillment” concerns “Paul’s preaching everywhere among the Gentiles” and “probably also has an eschatological orientation.... Paul’s commission is part of the eschatological acts of God, and his proclamation to the Gentiles facilitates the advancement of God’s plan for the world.”¹⁵ Through Paul’s ministry, Christ’s saving mission is extending to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 13:46–47; 26:22–23), thus fulfilling longstanding Old Testament hopes.¹⁶

One of the goals of missions is to see God’s Word fulfilled, and when it is, God is exalted as faithful and trustworthy. Hence, Paul declares, “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:18–19). God is calling you to take part as a goer or sender in fulfilling promises he made thousands of years ago.¹⁷ You can have a role in bringing the light of Christ into places that have been dark since the fall of mankind. God may be commissioning you to be Jesus’s feet and mouth to cross cultures for the sake of his name—to counter the bad news about wars and shootings, cancer and car accidents, relational tensions and immorality with the good news that peace with God is possible and eternal hope is real. Is God summoning you to this task?

Goal 2: Missions Seeks to Help People Value Christ as Their Greatest Treasure (Col 1:27)

“To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). The Greek reads τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου “the wealth of the glory of this mystery,” with both “wealth” (πλοῦτος) and “mystery” (μυστήριον) being neuter nouns. What then follows is a neuter pronoun “which” (ὃ) that marks the phrase “Christ in you” as explicating either “wealth” or “mystery.”¹⁸ Most scholars and contemporary translations (e.g., ESV, NIV) see “Christ in you” to be defining the “mystery,” and this is likely because “mystery” is the nearest neuter

¹⁴ Thus, Beale suggests the idea to be “that of Paul ‘completing’ the prophesied task of announcing God’s end-time salvation, a task that was begun by Jesus as the predicted Isaianic servant.” G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 145. Similarly, Schweizer, commenting on verse 24, says that Paul “brings Christ’s work to fulfillment by his authentic proclamation of him as the redeemer of the community.” Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 105.

¹⁵ Sumney, *Colossians*, 103.

¹⁶ Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 587–89.

¹⁷ Marshall notes, “Thus the task of Israel, which she failed to carry out, has passed to Jesus and then to his people as the new Israel; it is the task of bringing the light of revelation and salvation to all the peoples of the world.” I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 245.

¹⁸ So, too, Peter Müller, *Kolossenerbrief*, Meyers Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar Über Das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 202 n. 51.

referent.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the first noun in the chain is “wealth,” suggesting that Paul is emphasizing not just the “mystery” or even the “mystery’s glory” but “the *wealth* of the mystery’s glory.”²⁰ In 2:2 Paul notes that the “mystery” is Christ alone and hopes that those whom he serves will “reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In Christ is great wealth or riches, and those treasures [πλοῦτος] become our riches only when we gain understanding and knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ. Thus, while the grammar of 1:27 most directly supports seeing “Christ in you” as the “mystery,” the close context may suggest greater nuancing.²¹

The divine Son is “the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb 1:3), and we gain a “knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). As Christ reflects, resembles, and represents the Father God before us, He is glorious, precious, and wondrous—the greatest treasure. Yet only when Christ is in us does He become our riches, and this wealth is related to our hope of glory. Paul spoke of this hope back in Colossians 1:4–5: “We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.” We magnify Christ as our greatest treasure when Christ is in us and our hope rests in Him (cf. Matt 6:19–21; Rom 3:23; 2 Cor 4:6–7; Phil 1:21; 3:8).²²

Christ’s unmatched worth is highlighted in the way Paul clarifies that the mystery’s glory is precious and valuable. Elsewhere the apostle uses the phrase “the wealth of the glory” to highlight the amazing treasure of God’s revelation of Himself (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16) and of the inheritance that awaits His saints (Eph 1:18). We worship what we value most, and we glorify God most when He satisfies us most. A key purpose of missions is to help people value or treasure Christ in them above all else. “Worship is the fuel and goal of missions.”²³ Missions exists to see white hot

¹⁹ For more on the biblical use of “mystery,” see Benjamin L. Gladd, *Revealing the Mysterion: The Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with Its Bearing on First Corinthians*, BZBW 160 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008); G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014); Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 145–51; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Question 21: What Role Does ‘Mystery’ Play in Biblical Theology?,” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 205–14; Benjamin L. Gladd, “Mystery,” *DNTUOT*, 551–55.

²⁰ Many scholars consider the noun construction τῆς δόξης an attribute genitive (thus, “the glorious riches of this mystery,” e.g., NIV, NETB, CSB), a sense Harris captures in the translation, “the glorious riches that characterize this mystery.” Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71. For more on translation options, see Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 165–66. My interpretation of the wording is closer to his affirmation that “the point of verse 27 is that ‘the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles’ is ‘Christ,’ who is ‘the hope of glory.’” Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 150.

²¹ Moo recognizes some of the text’s nuances, and both Moule and Harris sees the mystery as both Christ and his presence “in you.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 156–58; H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 101; Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71.

²² See John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 3rd ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003). The riches that come with the hope of knowing Christ and embracing Christ are enough to help Christians endure through terrible suffering for Christ’s sake (e.g., Rom 5:1–5; 8:18–21; Phil 3:8–11; Heb 11:24–26, 32–40; 1 Pet 1:3–9; cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

²³ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 22. Our English term “worship” comes from the Old English term “worth-ship.” Worth is about wealth, and we worship or glorify what we value. In Psalm 22, which Jesus

worship explode across the earth. Christ is the mystery that God has now revealed, and His glory is magnified when He saves, fills, and satisfies lives. Thus, missionaries seek “the obedience of faith among all the nations *for the sake of [Jesus’s] name*” (Rom 1:5, author’s translation).

The highest goal of missions is to exalt Christ as glorious, and we value Christ most when we embrace Him as our greatest treasure. We receive help and hope and salvation, and He gets exalted as helper, hope-giver, and savior. Missionaries must treasure Christ and seek to help others treasure Christ above all else. Are you embracing Jesus as your greatest treasure today?

Goal 3: Missions Seeks to Present People Mature before God (Col 1:28)

Paul has stressed that “faith in Christ Jesus” and “love ... for all the saints” and “the hope laid up ... in heaven” are central to what is proclaimed in “the word of the truth, the gospel” (1:4–5). He has also celebrated that this Word has been “bearing fruit and increasing ... since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth” (1:6). As such, Paul the missionary urges this church to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which is proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (1:23).

One of Paul’s key missionary goals was to shape complete Christians—not only reaching people through first-level evangelism but also teaching and training people until every church is mature. Thus, we read in 1:28, “[Christ] we proclaim, warning *everyone* and teaching *everyone* with *all* wisdom, that we may present *everyone* mature in Christ.” The universality of this statement points to each individual that Paul and his missionary team (1:1, 7–8) engage worldwide, seeking their maturity.²⁴

What is maturity? Harris considers “a person mature in faith (cf. v. 23a) and in the knowledge of God’s will (cf. v. 9c)” to be “someone who has attained mature adulthood and is no longer misled by false doctrine (Eph. 4:13–14; cf. Heb. 5:14).”²⁵ Certainly this is true, but maturity is not limited to proper convictions; it also relates to one’s character. As Moo notes, “Similar to the Hebrew *tamim* (which is translated by *teleios* five times in the LXX), *teleios* connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one’s devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in

quotes at his death declaring, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1), Yahweh declares of the anointed king’s substitutionary sacrifice, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall *worship* before you” (22:27). That is, they will recognize and celebrate his worth.

²⁴ Moo notes the universality, cautions against taking it as referring to “every person in the universe,” and concludes, “The repetition of the phrase therefore emphasizes the full measure of gospel proclamation that Paul and his associates bring to every person they encounter. Each one is ‘admonished’ and ‘taught’ with the goal that each one might be presented fully mature in Christ.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 158. The universality continues as Paul speaks of “*all* the riches of full assurance of understanding” (2:2) and of “*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). Moo further notes, “The goal of the proclamation here makes it more likely that both activities [admonishing and teaching] are directed to Christian converts.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 159.

²⁵ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 73; cf. Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 68–69.

conduct (see esp. Matt. 5:48; 19:21; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14; Jas. 1:4b).”²⁶ Signals of maturity within the book include the following:

- “Faith in Christ” and “love ... for all the saints” (1:4);
- Being “filled with the knowledge of [Christ’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:9–10);
- Being “strengthened with all power, according to [God’s] glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father” (1:11–12);
- Continuing “in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that [we] heard” (1:23);
- “Encouraged” hearts and “being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” (2:2);
- Having “good order and the firmness of ... faith in Christ” (2:5);
- Walking in Christ, “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (2:7);
- Not being taken “captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8);
- Not “insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head” (2:18–19);
- Setting our “minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (3:2);
- Putting “to death ... what is earthly” in us (3:5, 8–9);
- “Being renewed in knowledge after the image of [our] creator” (3:10);
- Putting on “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and ... forgiving each other” (3:12–13);
- Putting on “love” and letting “the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts” (3:14–15);
- Letting “the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly” (3:16) and “doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17);
- Wives submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, fathers not provoking their children, bondservants obeying their masters and working “heartily ... as for the Lord and not for men,” and masters treating their “bondservants justly and fairly” (3:18–4:1);
- Continuing “steadfastly in prayer” (4:2);
- Walking “in wisdom toward outsiders” (4:5);
- Letting our “speech always be gracious” (4:6).

Maturity matters (cf. Heb 5:13–14), and it is a key goal in missions!

²⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 160.

Humans operate maturely when they function as God intended them from the beginning. As those made in God’s image (Gen 1:26–28), the mature are those who in their words, thoughts, and deeds revere God and reflect, resemble, and represent him rightly, displaying His worth, greatness, values, and kingship to the world. When we pray, “Hallowed be your name; your kingdom come” (Matt 6:9–10), we are asking that God’s name, His greatness would be shown holy and that His reign would be realized “on earth as it is in heaven.” To every believer, God has given “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). We encounter God’s glory by gazing on Jesus, and as we behold “the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (3:18).

To the level at which we display Christ’s worth and live hating what He hates and loving what He loves, we are living as mature Christians. Our “faith in Christ Jesus” and “love ... for all the saints” and “hope laid up ... in heaven” are to be “bearing fruit and increasing” (Col 1:4–6). One goal of missions is to help people become mature, seeing themselves conformed into the likeness of Christ.²⁷ Are you a Christian whose new creational life is “being renewed in knowledge after the image its creator” (3:10)? God’s Word is fulfilled only when missions seeks the maturity of the saints (cf. Eph 4:11–13).²⁸

Conclusion: Why Missions?

God calls for missions and sets the goals for missions. This passage sets out three goals for missions, but ultimately all three relate to one singular purpose. Indeed, for Paul to say missions seeks to present people mature means the same thing as helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, and it is only when this happens that God’s Word, long promised is fulfilled. Hence, God has purposed that the church engage in missions to fulfill His Word by helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, which is the mark of Christian maturity.

People can enjoy, cherish, treasure a living hope today when they see, celebrate, and savor Christ as glorious and valuable, more precious than things of earth. God is calling you today to be either a goer or a sender for this great cause—proclaiming light to those living in darkness, hope to the hopeless, and Christ as the only treasure that will last forever. “God desired to make known what is the wealth of this mystery’s glory among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27, author’s translation). Will you answer this call?

Means: How Missions?

God is passionate to see multitudes magnifying the majesty of His glory revealed in Christ, which is a treasure filled with power that God puts into the lives of fragile

²⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 236–48. In Colossians, the context for maturity to flourish is the proclamation of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture.

²⁸ See Juan Manuel Granados Rojas, “Is the Word of God Incomplete? An Exegetical and Rhetorical Study of Col 1,25,” *Bib* 94, no. 1 (2013): 63–79; Stephen I. Wright, “Discipleship as an Integral Component of World Mission Strategy,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 105–29.

missionaries—jars of clay (2 Cor 4:6–7). Now we must consider *how* churches who send and missionaries who go reach this goal of exalting Christ among the nations. What is the means for the missionary task? Paul gives two answers in Colossians 1:24–29.

We Engage in Missions by Suffering Joyfully to Illustrate Christ's Afflictions and Love for Those He Died to Save (Col 1:24)

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). Suffering and sacrifice are not something we long for, but they are often necessary for growth and gain. Piper notes, “We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell to buy it. If we will sell all, then we measure the worth as supreme. If we will not, what we have is treasured more.”²⁹ Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then *in his joy* he goes and sells *all that he has* and buys that field” (Matt 13:44). Piper adds, “The extent of his *sacrifice* and the depth of his *joy* display the worth he puts on the treasure of God. Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God's worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer.”³⁰

In Colossians 1:24, Paul declares that he is rejoicing in his sufferings. Romans 5:3–5 is similar: “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” What Colossians 1:24 adds is that Paul's suffering is not just benefiting him; it is *for the church*, implying that it is nurturing *their* endurance, character, and hope (cf. 2 Tim 2:10). And because of the benefit his suffering gives, he rejoices for their sake. So, what suffering is Paul enduring as a missionary, and how is this suffering benefiting the Colossians?

Most immediately, Paul's suffering refers primarily to imprisonment, likely in Rome.³¹ Thus, he writes, “Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which *I am bound*” (4:3). Or again, “Aristarchus *my fellow prisoner* greets you” (4:10). And finally, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember *my chains*” (4:18).

Nevertheless, Paul's suffering was not limited to the Roman jail. From the earliest stages of his calling, Paul knew that he would suffer much. In Acts 9:16 God says of Saul regarding his upcoming missionary task to the Gentiles, “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” And suffer he did. Consider the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 11:24–28:

²⁹ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 93.

³⁰ Piper, 93.

³¹ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 295; Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 58–59; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul’s suffering followed the words and example of Jesus, who says, “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Similarly, as Paul ministered to churches, he sought to strengthen “the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The missionary task is always wrought with trial and pain, for God purposes His saints’ suffering to be a key means for proclaiming to the world “who Christ is, how he loves, and how much he is worth.”³²

Consider the second half of Colossians 1:24: “In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” What does Paul mean that he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”?³³ Was Christ’s saving work in some way ineffective? Paul stresses that this is *not* the case: “You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col 1:21–22). Jesus’s death fully reconciles people to God and empowers our growth in holiness. And again, “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (2:13–15). Christ’s death has *fully* reconciled his church to God, and his resurrection has *fully* overcome all enemy opposition. So, what does Paul mean when he says, “I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (1:24)?

³² John Piper, *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ: The Cost of Bringing the Gospel to the Nations in the Lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton*, *The Swans Are Not Silent* 5 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 14. While unnecessarily downplaying the need for words, Barth and Blanke note, “It is in the suffering of his servants that God reveals his message which is entrusted to them, so that they themselves—and not their words—become the medium for this proclamation, and ‘finally so that God reveals himself as the proclaimer.’” Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 291.

³³ For a helpful overview of the varied interpretations of this phrase, see John Henry Paul Reumann, “Colossians 1:24 (‘What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ’): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance,” *CurTM* 17, no. 6 (1990): 454–61; Joel White, “Paul Completes the Servant’s Sufferings (Colossians 1:24),” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6 (2016): 181–98; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 136–43, 161–62; Holly Beers, “Filling up What Is Lacking in Christ’s Afflictions: Isaiah’s Servant and Servants in Second Temple Judaism and Colossians 1:24,” in *Who Created Christianity? Fresh Approaches to the Relationship between Paul and Jesus*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Aaron W. White (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020), 432–45. For a more thorough treatment, see Clark, *Completing Christ’s Afflictions*.

What he means is that the suffering of Christ's saints illustrates both Christ's worth to the sufferer and Christ's afflictions and love for those He died to save. Suffering is not only the result of the missionary task; it is part of the means for fulfilling it by extending and presenting Christ's worth and tribulations.³⁴ We potentially find a helpful parallel in Philippians 2:30. The Philippian church had raised support for Paul, and they chose one named Epaphroditus to deliver the missionary gift. In route, however, "he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me." In Greek, the phrase "*complete what was lacking* in your service to me" in Philippians 2:30 is almost identical with "*filling up what is lacking* in Christ's afflictions" in Colossians 1:24.³⁵ In what way was Epaphroditus completing what was lack in the Philippians' service to Paul. He had to deliver their gift in person (cf. 1 Cor 16:17).³⁶ So, what does Paul mean when he says he is "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"?

He means this: The Lord Jesus prepared a love offering for His bride, the church, by suffering and dying for sinners. The offering lacks nothing in its effectiveness to save, but Jesus has chosen to use His saints (people like Paul and perhaps you) to make a personal presentation of Christ's afflictions and love to the world.³⁷ In this way, missionaries' suffering demonstrates two things: (1) Christ's worth, that He is more valuable than their physical safety and security, and (2) Christ's love, that He loves the nations enough to sacrifice the safety and security of His body for the sake of His sheep among the nations. In 2 Corinthians 4:8–12, the missionary Paul says:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be

³⁴ Commenting on 1 Corinthians, Hafemann speaks of Paul's "apostolic suffering as the revelatory vehicle through which the knowledge of God as made manifest in the cross of Christ and in the power of the Spirit is being disclosed." Scott Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 174.

³⁵ ἀναπλήρωση ... ὑστέρημα "he may fill up ... what is lacking" (Phil 3:20); ἀναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα "I am filling up what is lacking" (Col 1:24). Clark dismisses the representative interpretation, arguing that "the apostle's afflictions (and his alone [as opposed to those of the church] in some way bring completion to the former afflictions of the now exalted Christ." Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 37–44, quote from 43–44. In contrast, I see all the church's sufferings as representative and by this means completing Christ's afflictions.

³⁶ Hafemann notes, "Paul does not say that he *adds* to the number of sufferings needed but that he actually 'fills up' or 'completes' what is *lacking* in Christ's sufferings, namely its missionary transport. The issue in Col 1:24 is not the quality or quantity of Christ's suffering but its portrayal to those for whom it is intended." Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," 180–81 n. 35. Lang comes to a similar conclusion after examining the use of the phrase in conjunction with πλούτος in Col 1:27: "To complete what is lacking' is thus to disburse christological wealth to those for whom it has been credited but not yet personally transferred, and this transfer necessarily entails Paul's own Christ-like sufferings." T. J. Lang, "Disbursing the Account of God: Fiscal Terminology and the Economy of God in Colossians 1,24–25," *ZNW* 107, no. 1 (2016): 119.

³⁷ As Schreiner notes, "Paul's ministry was the means by which the message of Christ was extended to the gentiles." Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 351. Most likely, the phrase "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" does not exclusively apply the apostles, for the use of a similar phrase in Philippians 2:30 and 1 Corinthians 16:17 suggests that any Christian who suffers while remaining faithful to Christ "fills up what is lacking in Christ's affliction."

manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Suffering is an essential part of Christian mission. Furthermore, it is a primary means of confirming that we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,” for those who “suffer with him” will in turn “also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17; cf. Phil 3:10).

On December 5, 2013, terrorists murdered Ronnie Smith, a Christian missionary from Texas, who was serving as a schoolteacher in a north African city. Ronnie and his wife and child had moved there a year and a half earlier to spread a passion for God’s supremacy in all things for the joy of those people through Jesus Christ. On that Thursday Ronnie went on his morning jog and was gunned down because of his commitment to Jesus.³⁸ That was December 5, 2013. On February 1, 2014, less than two months after Ronnie’s martyrdom, I found myself at his church in Texas, training nearly 300 leaders in an all-day workshop. In the middle of the room were probably over 100 men and women who had recently committed themselves to go to the hardest places on the planet with the good news that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe. Whereas the terrorists thought that killing Ronnie would put an end to gospel witness, God was using his death and his family’s suffering to multiply that witness in the world by 100-fold. Writing around AD 160–225 during a time when Rome was massively persecuting Christians, the church father Tertullian said, “The oftener we are mown down by you [Romans], the more in number we [Christians] grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”³⁹

It may seem counter-intuitive, but for centuries God has motivated new missionaries to go by hearing the stories of believers who surrendered and suffered because they counted Jesus a greater treasure than worldly pleasure (cf. Heb 11:26). “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25; cf. Mark 8:35; 2 Cor 4:14–18). In His body Christ suffered before enjoying His resurrection (Heb 12:2), and the church as His body must endure suffering before our resurrection (cf. Rev 6:9–11). “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:16–19). God’s plan for saving His world includes raising up people who are ready to walk Calvary’s road for the sake of Christ’s name and for the joy of all peoples. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Recall Colossians 1:27: “God desired to make known what is the wealth of this mystery’s glory among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”

³⁸ <https://wng.org/sift/a-life-laid-down-1617251403>; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/american-teacher-slain-in-benghazi-was-the-heart-of-the-school-student-says/>.

³⁹ Tertullian, *The Apology*, translated by Rev. S. Thelwell in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian. I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004, originally 1885), 55.

(author's translation). *When missionaries joyfully suffer for Christ's sake, they illustrate Christ's afflictions and love for those He died to save.*⁴⁰ Consider Schreiner's reflections on the role of suffering in Paul's mission:

Paul's suffering was vital to his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles. We should not conceive of Paul as engaging in mission and experiencing the unfortunate consequence of suffering in the process, as if his difficulties were unrelated to his mission. On the contrary, the pain Paul endured was the means by which the message of the gospel was extended to the nations. Suffering was not a side effect of the Pauline mission; rather it was at the very center of his apostolic evangelism. His pains validated and legitimated his message, demonstrating the truth of the gospel. This is not to say that sufferings in and of themselves ratify the truth of the Pauline gospel. Rather, Paul's sufferings provide evidence of the truth of his gospel. Indeed, his sufferings are a corollary of the sufferings of Jesus. Obviously Paul's anguish was not atoning, nor did he bear the sins of God's people in a substitutionary death as Jesus did. His suffering was, however, central to his apostolic calling.⁴¹

Through His saints' suffering, God displays for the world the marks of Christ (Gal 6:17) and the love of Christ to save sinners. Terrorists are willing to die to kill others; Christians are willing to die to save others. May we be such people.

We Engage in Missions by Toiling with God's Power to Proclaim Christ through Warning and Teaching (Col 1:28–29)

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:28–29). Suffering is a necessary but not sufficient means to see souls saved. As Paul questions elsewhere, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14–15).

People get converted and move toward maturity only by hearing and responding to God's Word of truth. Through His Word God grants rebirth in Christ, moving people from death to life. “You have been born again ... through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). Through His Word God helps saints conquer sin and become more holy. Hence, Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Through His Word God moves saints to endure unto glory. As Paul says, “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

⁴⁰ Gupta highlights the pleasure that comes not from suffering for its own sake but for suffering for Christ's sake: “Paul is *pleased* to suffer not because it feels good or looks good or earns him favor or credit in the world but because he can actively engage in the primary form of covenantal growth mapped out by Jesus himself.” Nijay K. Gupta, *Colossians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 80.

⁴¹ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 83.

As a missionary, Paul toiled to see healthy churches grow, which necessitated keeping Christ central (“him we proclaim”) and doing so by “warning” and “teaching” (Col 1:28). Because God takes sin seriously, we should as well. Therefore, the apostle regularly cautions his listeners regarding the impending danger that will fall on all who fail to persevere in heeding God’s Word. He writes, “And you ... he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, ... if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (1:21–23). The proof of one’s reconciliation is endurance in the faith. Where compromise persists, divine fury will follow. Thus, Paul asserts, “Put to death ... what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming” (3:5–6). And later he urges bondservants, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality” (3:23–25; cf. Rom 11:22).

Along with warning, teaching is imperative. Through hearing “the word of truth, the gospel,” the Colossians had grown in their “faith in Christ Jesus,” their “love ... for all the saints,” and their “hope laid up ... in heaven” (Col 1:4–5). Paul then adds: “You heard [the gospel] and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (1:6–7). In his letter, Paul clarifies how God had delivered the Colossian Christians from “the domain of darkness” and placed them into Christ’s kingdom (1:13–14). He exults in Christ’s preeminence (1:15–20) and instructs those who have “received Christ Jesus the Lord” to, in turn, “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught” (2:6). His letter is merely enforcing and codifying what the believers had earlier heard regarding the person and work of Christ and the implications of being a Christian. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (3:1).

Both warning and teaching are necessary for the church to grow. Thus, Paul urges, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (3:16). Yet the work of proclaiming Christ must not be done in one’s own strength.

Indeed, God’s “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). In Colossians 1:29, Paul piles up words related to power: “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (cf. 1:11). Central to the missionary task is trusting in a big God to do what we cannot accomplish on our own. God’s grace does not make the toilsome task unnecessary; it makes it possible (Phil 2:12–13). As sinful humans, we cannot save human souls by means of our own strength. But with God, “all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). Thus, Paul worked with the strength God supplied to accomplish his ministry, and so must we (cf. 1 Pet 4:11). Ministry of the Word is a toilsome task, especially when fruit is not immediately visible.⁴² Yet we

⁴² Schweizer comments, “All the trouble and activity that the apostle allows his ministry to involve him in, and also the source of all this, lies completely in the power of Christ. This is not transcendent in the sense that it takes effect in another world; it does indeed come to the apostle from beyond, from the transcendent, but it takes effect in the concrete situation of his life and work on earth.” Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 112.

learn from Paul, who said that, in relation to the other apostles, “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:10). Christ-honoring ministers and missionaries are those who toil to proclaim Christ while trusting in the all-sufficient God to work for His glory and the joy of those He came to save.⁴³

Conclusion: How Missions?

According to Paul in Colossians 1:24–29, we engage in missions (1) by suffering joyfully to illustrate Christ’s afflictions and love to those he died to save and (2) by proclaiming Christ through warning and teaching with God’s power. At the heart of the Great Commission is a call to bear witness to Jesus with the help of the Spirit. We proclaim Jesus through our suffering, but this is not sufficient to save souls. We must also proclaim Jesus through our words—sharing the good news that the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Will you take up this call to suffer and to share. Christ’s kingdom expands through such sacrifice and boldness. Is God calling you to surrender to this task? If so, find some others who can pray with you about this possibility.

Mandate: Now Missions!

Jesus says to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt 9:36–37). Paul believes he is part of the fulfillment of seeing this prayer answered. Furthermore, several factors suggest that he speaks of his own motivation and means for missions in places like Colossians 1:24–29 to see the same passions awakened in every Christian within every local congregation.

Note, for example, that Paul is with Timothy when writing Colossians (Col 1:1–2), and at the least these two stand behind the apostle’s use of the first-person *plural* in statements like, “Him *we* proclaim” (1:28). The mission is, therefore, not limited to the apostles, for others are involved. Similarly, in Acts 13 Paul points to Isaiah 49:6 to clarify to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia why he and Barnabas are turning to the Gentiles in their mission: “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” In its original context, this text highlights the global mission of God’s individual messianic servant Jesus. Yet now all those in Christ—whether apostles like Paul or partners like Barnabas—carry out Christ’s mission of seeing

⁴³ Sumney captures well this idea: “This verse’s most important point is that God empowers Paul’s work for the Colossians, and for the whole church. Paul’s successes and his apostleship are not of his own doing. While he does labor strenuously, he remains completely dependent upon the power of God. His sufferings are part of this strenuous work, and he is able to endure tribulation for the sake of the church only because the working of God enables him.... The power of God enables the ministry of the apostles in the same way that it enables all Christian obedience and life.” Sumney, *Colossians*, 111.

those from the nations become mature disciples. Coming back to Colossians, note the following parallels:

- “Him we proclaim, *warning* [νουθετοῦντες] everyone and *teaching* [διδάσκοντες] everyone *with all wisdom* [ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ]” (Col 1:28).
- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [πλουσίως; cf. 1:27] *with all wisdom* (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ), *teaching* [διδάσκοντες] and *warning* [νουθετοῦντες] one another” (3:16, author’s translation).

The similar terminology in both Colossians 1:28 and 3:16 highlights that Paul extends his missionary goals to every Christian within every local congregation. Mature disciples become disciple-makers because they are concerned to see Christ worshiped on a global scale. And just as Paul suffered for the sake of Christ’s name (Col 1:24), so all believers must suffer in our earthly calling to make disciples of all nations (2 Tim 2:3, 9; 3:12).⁴⁴

Even as I write this study, I am praying for God to awaken hearts and to shape world Christians who are willing to take great “risk” for the sake of Christ’s name. What is God doing in you? Is he calling you to be a goer or a sender? Those are your obedient options. This study has considered the motivation and means for missions. But knowing *Why Missions* and *How Missions* is not enough. We must also recognize the mandate for missions today—*Now Missions!* I, therefore, end this extended meditation by reflecting on implications and applications of the main points set forth thus far. What does missions now look like in view of Colossians 1:24–29?

If Missions Is God’s Initiative (Col 1:25), Then Ask Him How He Wants You to Be Involved

Paul’s ministry was a stewardship from God (Col 1:25). Christ calls His church to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18), and He promises that from generation to generation “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18). Paul was an “apostle to the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15; Rom 11:13), but it wasn’t just apostles that God called to go. For example, in Acts 13:2–3 the Holy Spirit also called Barnabas to join Paul in the missionary task. Then other figures periodically joined them, like John Mark (13:5; cf. 15:37), Silas (15:40), Timothy (16:1–3), and Luke (16:10).⁴⁵

Scripture portrays different kinds of missionaries.

1. *Paul-like missionaries.* In Corinthians Paul expresses his hope to “preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence” (2 Cor 10:16). Similarly, in Romans 15:20 he says, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.” Still, as we have already seen in Colossians 1:28, Paul did not just plant a church and run to the next location; his goal was to shape mature churches. This is why

⁴⁴ Cf. Mark 8:34; 10:30; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:17; 1 Thess 1:5; 3:3; 1 Pet 4:12–13.

⁴⁵ Consider also the thirty-five personal references listed at the end of Romans 16, some of which refer to more than one person and all of whom Paul considers his fellow workers in Christ.

he stayed in Ephesus three years (Acts 20:31), declaring the kingdom and proclaiming the whole counsel of God (20:25, 28).

2. *Apollos-type missionaries.* Some missionaries minister after a church is already planted, as was the case in Corinth (Acts 18:1–17 with 19:1). Hence, Paul said to the Corinthians, “I planted the seeds, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor 3:5–6).
3. *Timothy-like missionaries.* These missionaries engage in long-term shepherding in a foreign context (1 Tim 1:3). Timothy left his home in Lystra (Acts 16:1), traveled with Paul for a time doing missionary work in various places (16:3–5), and then settled away from home, with Paul’s encouragement, in Ephesus to shepherd the young church (1 Tim 1:3) after its founding with its own outreach (Acts 19:10) and elders (20:17).

Furthermore, God calls others to help shape local churches that are mobilizing centers that send others “in a manner worthy of God” and “support” them. Thus, John writes, “You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 6b–8). Such support includes helping missionaries through advocacy and financial provision (Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 9:11; Gal 6:6; Titus 3:13) and contributing financially to the needs of those they are serving (Rom 15:25–27; 2 Cor 8:1–5; 9:2, 6–15). Through such means churches and missionaries become partners in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and “fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 8).

Knowing that the missionary task is a “stewardship from God” (Col 1:25), missions now means that you should be prayerfully assessing whether God is calling you to go “out for the sake of the name” (3 John 7) or to send and support.⁴⁶ This may take time to assess, and it is wise to obtain the affirmation of godly counselors and to gain all necessary training so you can be faithful in your task. Regardless, God is calling you either to go or send; anything less is disobedient. He desires that you become a world Christian who wants to see Christ proclaimed and disciples shaped among “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9).

If the Means of Missions Is Suffering (Col 1:24–25) and Sharing (1:28–29),
and If the Motivation for Missions Is to See Others Treasure Christ (1:25–28),
Then Fight Entitlement, Train, Share, and Commit to Treasure
Christ, Come What May

The Apostle Peter says, “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet 4:12–13).

⁴⁶ Johnson notes, “One of the things we see clearly in Scripture is that a concern for missions is for all Christians, because it is a concern for every local church, together.” Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 20.

After the Communists took over Romania, Christian minister Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned and endured 14 years of torture for the sake of Christ’s name (1948–1964). He wrote, urging believers to get spiritually ready to suffer:

What shall we do about these tortures? Will we be able to bear them? If I do not bear them I put in prison another fifty or sixty men whom I know, because that is what the Communists wish from me, to betray those around me. And here comes the great need for the role of preparation for suffering which must start now. *It is too difficult* to prepare yourself for it when the Communists have put you in prison....

In prison you lose everything. You are undressed and given a prisoner’s suit. No more nice furniture, nice carpets, or nice curtains. You do not have a wife any more and you do not have your children. You do not have your library and you never see a flower. Nothing of what makes life pleasant remains. Nobody resists who has not renounced the pleasures of life beforehand.⁴⁷

From Paul’s own prison cell, he writes to the Philippians, “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:20–21). What does Paul mean when he expresses his hope that he will honor Christ in his body by life, for to him, to live is Christ? I think he answers a little later when he says, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (3:7–8). Paul’s quest was not to acquire goods or health or status or fame. He is in a prison rejoicing because the loss of all else is allowing him to gain Christ in his life. But what does Paul mean when he expresses his hope that Christ will be honored in his body by death, for to die is gain? This he answers in 1:23: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” We honor Christ in death when we die believing that to be with Him is far better than this life.

Karen Watson was a missionary in her thirties from California, who gave her life for Christ in the Middle East when caught in a line of gunfire on March 15, 2004. Before her death she wrote a letter that depicts a beautiful treasuring of Jesus above her earthly life. Here is part of her note.⁴⁸

Dear Pastor Phil & Pastor Roger,

You should only be opening this letter in the event of death.

When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn’t called to a place. I

⁴⁷ Richard Wurmbrand, “Preparing the Underground Church,” *Epiphany Journal* 5, no. 4 (1985): 46–48.

⁴⁸ Erich Bridges and Jerry Rankin, *Lives Given, Not Taken: 21st Century Southern Baptist Martyrs* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2005), 191–92.

was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward, His glory my reward....

The Missionary Heart:

Care more than some think is wise
Risk more than some think is safe
Dream more than some think is practical
Expect more than some think is possible

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience....

There is no Joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving Him. I love you two and my church family.

In His Care,
Salaam, Karen

Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." He then adds, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and *count the cost*, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:26–30).

Missions now in such a context means:

1. *You will begin to count the cost of what it could mean to follow Jesus.* Your parents, children, siblings, or friends may think crossing a culture for Jesus's sake is radical or strange. Yet this may be part of the cross that Christ calls you to bear for the sake of His name. Paul says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8).
2. *You will train to warn and teach with care.* Paul told Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Missionaries must know God's Word and understand how Christ relates to everything. Paul told the Corinthians, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). For this missionary, all he did and taught was connected to the cross. As Carson says of Paul, "He cannot talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally tying it to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross centered."⁴⁹ So, too, must be every missionary.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 83.

3. *Teaching cross-culturally also means that you must know your people—their language, their culture, their worldview. And you must embrace it with joy, for “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21).*
4. *You will eagerly and boldly proclaim the gospel to those around you—both to Christians and non-Christians, resolving that you are “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). Paul has three tenses when he speaks about salvation. “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). The gospel has justified us (past salvation), freeing us from sin’s penalty. The gospel is sanctifying us (present salvation), freeing us from sin’s power. And the gospel will glorify us (future salvation), freeing us from sin’s presence and protecting us from God’s wrath eternally. Be bold to proclaim the gospel, remembering that “Christ in you” is your “hope” (Col 1:27) and that God made you a mere “jar of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God” and not you (2 Cor 4:7).*

If Missionaries Must Toil with God’s Strength (Col 1:29), Then Depend on God and Pray for Missionaries to Endure and Succeed with God’s Help

Paul struggled with all Christ’s energy that He powerfully worked in him (Col 1:29). The Apostle also pled for the Colossian church to “pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison” (4:3). Globally minded Christians must recognize that the task of world evangelization will only be accomplished by Christ working through His people. Christ alone builds the church (Matt 16:18), and God alone causes its growth (1 Cor 3:6–7). Thus, we “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13). “Whatever [we] do, in word or deed,” we seek to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17). God is worthy of the world’s worship. So “whoever speaks, [do so] as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, [do so] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11).

Conclusion

In Colossians 1:24–29 Paul rejoices in his sufferings and through them fills up Christ’s afflictions, for these trials provide a context to realize his calling to serve the church by making known with great toil the wealth of Christ’s glory among the Gentiles, thus fulfilling God’s Word. In this study we have considered how this text captures Paul’s motivation, means, and mandate for global missions. As for motivation, God has purposed that the church engage in missions to fulfill His Word by helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, which is the mark of Christian maturity. As for means, we engage in missions by suffering joyfully to

illustrate Christ's afflictions and love to those He died to save and by proclaiming Christ through warning and teaching with God's power. As for mandate, every Christian must be a goer or a sender, seeking "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ's] name among all the nations" (Rom 1:5). Mature churches seek to make worshiping disciples of Jesus Christ from all nations through both reaching and teaching. "Him we proclaim ... that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). Will you take part in missions for the sake of Jesus's name?