

## Intro

Last week in our Timothy Track class I was questioned as to why I made no comments about the recent Supreme Court decision that overturned Roe vs Wade. As we consider this morning's passage I'll share some thoughts related to that question.

How does Paul's autobiographical account of his ministry shed light our focus in the local church?

## READ PASSAGE

### Body

#### Passage focus

I'm using Paul as a model for Palermo Christian Church. His task should be our task. His method should be our method. His goal should be our goal. His confidence should be our confidence.

#### **BIG IDEA: Follow Paul's example**

#### **Point 1: Paul's task: gospel to the nations (1:24-27)**

##### Paul's attitude

*"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" – 1:24*

Paul sees good in his suffering. Others will profit from his undesirable circumstances.

##### **How is Paul "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"?**

*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, – 1:24*

Is Jesus' death sufficient to take the penalty our sins deserve? (pause) Is Jesus' death lacking and Paul's suffering completes Jesus' atonement? (pause) Good. Paul isn't saying Jesus did 90% of the work and I need to finish the last 10%.

*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. – Hebrews 10:12-14*

Jesus's single offering is sufficient. We trust in the finished work of Christ alone. Not in Paul. Not in ourselves.

#### **So what does Paul mean?**

- 1) When Paul suffers Jesus suffers

*And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" – Acts 9:4*

When Paul persecuted Christians he was persecuting Jesus = when Paul is persecuted his opponents are persecuting Jesus.

2) Paul suffers for Jesus' body, the church ("*for your sake*")

Gospel resistance led to being publicly stripped, stoning, beaten with rods, imprisonment, verbal abuse, death threats.

3) Paul's suffering physically manifests the life of Jesus

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you. – 2 Corinthians 4:8-12*

Jesus' death isn't lacking in what it achieves for sinners. Jesus' death is lacking a present, physical representation. Paul's suffering replays the rejection of Christ (a rewind). Paul's endurance replays Jesus enduring the cross. Life comes to the Corinthians through Paul's suffering, just like Jesus' suffering brings life to us.

## Steward

### Paul suffers because he's a steward.

Steward = a manager of a household or one given a task/responsibility.

Think a restaurant manager who reports to the owner. The owner expects the manager to perform certain functions well. Serving quality meals, wise purchasing of food, appropriate menu pricing, good employee selection, good employee training, keeping up with equipment, keeping the place clean. The owner entrusts the manager with a variety of tasks. The steward must wisely make use of the materials at their disposal and accomplish the owner's goals: profit, good reputation, repeat customers, etc.

### Steward of what?

1) "*to make the word of God fully known...among the Gentiles*" (1:25, 27) = evangelism

Steward of a message = called to a task. Accountable to God.

- a) Speak this message (not shift to an alternative, more appealing to hearers message)
- b) Speak this message well
- c) Continue to speak this message.

### What message?

*"to make the word of God fully known"* = to share the entire biblical account, and more specifically the central message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The message of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ alone. Substitutionary atonement. Jesus dying in the place of sinners. Taking the punishment we deserve. Calling people to turn from rebellion to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection.

### Stewardship implications

What does Paul's stewardship have to do with a pastor's comments on current events?

Paul's tasks are the tasks of the church. The tasks of elders. My task isn't to keep you up on current events or weigh in on political matters. **Hear me out please!** This isn't all I have to say.

Jesus' aim wasn't to push a social agenda. Ending poverty, etc. His aim was to gather apostles and a community of disciples, die, rise, and send his disciples out to the nations with the gospel.

Paul's aim wasn't to reform the policies of the Roman Empire. He said submit to them so long as they don't compel you to sin or prevent you from obeying God. Paul's aim was to make disciples and establish healthy local churches. Paul said submit to wicked rulers so long as they don't compel you to sin or prevent you from obeying God. **Altering Roman society fell outside of the stewardship given to Paul.**

What I'm saying is pushing a social agenda falls outside the task of Palermo Christian Church and its pastor. My focus isn't national headlines or public policy. My focus is Paul's focus: evangelism and fully-formed disciples. Too much attention to other things takes our focus off where it should be. Paul Mackey isn't sent to Japan to reform Japanese society. He's sent to proclaim the gospel and bring converts to maturity.

I don't say this to communicate that social matters are irrelevant. They're just not the church's mission and focus. Let's proceed.

## **Point 2: Paul's method: teaching God's word (1:28)**

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, – 1:28*

Paul proclaims Jesus. In Colossians Paul speaks of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Redemption. Reconciliation. Substitutionary atonement. Continuing in the faith by rejecting false philosophies. Christ in you. Putting sin to death. Putting on righteousness. Every element is proclaiming Jesus.

To proclaim is to preach. Both negative and positive instruction. Warning = correction, explaining the consequences of sin. Teaching = instruction based upon the apostles' doctrine. Doctrines and their implications for our conduct. **Preaching involves warning and teaching!**

Did you notice how Paul goes about producing complete, not lacking believers? Warning and teaching. What do you think was his source? God's word. What creates fully functioning, complete, not lacking Christians? God's word.

Why do I think God's word, the Bible is central in the service? God's word converts sinners. God's word produces complete Christians. Why is my confidence in God's word and not other things? God's word converts sinners. God's word produces complete Christians.

## **Implications**

We trust in God's word to do God's work. So we elevate God's word in our service. We don't trust in the transformative power of New York Times articles. So we don't elevate political discussion. But we do believe we should think and feel like God. So we use Scripture to shape our public policy convictions.

Word-centered = practice conforming to the word, not head knowledge. Obedience rooted in love and trust.

### **Point 3: Paul's goal: complete Christians (1:28)**

*that we may present everyone mature in Christ. – 1:28*

That indicates purpose. Paul uses God's word to bring believers to maturity. Paul believes teaching God's word is what brings Christians to maturity. Paul wants all Christians to be complete when Jesus returns (present).

#### **Mature**

Literal meaning is moving from childhood to adulthood. Spiritually meaning fully developed disciple. Living according to all that Jesus commands. Knowing Christian doctrine, knowing how to use Christian doctrine in real life, living well. Not lacking. Complete.

This fits with Paul's prayer for them. Knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom, fully pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work. It's a holistic disciple. Jesus' commandments integrated into all of life.

Paul's going to go on to discuss rejecting erroneous philosophies, rejecting manmade regulations, putting sin to death, living out fruits of the Spirit in Christian community, marriage roles, child-parent roles, slave-master roles, and every believer living as a missionary in their local community. Complete.

Paul's goal isn't getting decisions. Paul's goal is fully-formed disciples. This is why he puts his life on the line. This is why suffering doesn't make him shift or quit. This is why he's exerting his body to its limits. He has a goal. **What kills selfishness? Bible rooted, Spirit-moved goals.**

**Is this your goal?** It should be. Let's not say, but we have a sin nature, and kill off any intention of moving in the direction Paul desires. Let's take seriously the goal. Paul prays for it. Paul gives everything he has for it.

I'm not saying we can eradicate sin. I'm saying we can make radical progress. Our lives, our homes, our church can move closer to God's word. We shouldn't ever settle for less. The goal requires effort and the right tool, God's word.

#### **Maturity implications**

Back to current events, public policy. Our goal when we gather is edification, building up this body of believers. Becoming complete Christians.

Our goal isn't discussing public policy. But how we handle public policy is part of maturity.

**First**, I want God's word to set the agenda for the church. Not national headlines.

Our focus of mission and maturity can be replaced with political discussion.

**Second**, we need to know what we're talking about.

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; – James 1:19*

I'm not compelled to give a quick response. I'm not compelled to let current events govern our time together. Sunday evening might be a good time for a discussion.

Knowing what we're talking about requires good resources. I went to The Gospel Coalition and the Christian Civic League of Maine.

**Third**, we must speak as Christians who want to see non-Christians become Christians. So I want to be careful in what I communicate. Sanctity of human life is grounded in the fact that we're created in God's image. That's why it's unlawful to take a human life. That's why God established a death penalty for taking lives.

If you have had an abortion, my aim isn't your despair or animosity. There's mercy in Christ. All sins, like abortion, can be forgiven because Jesus' death is an infinitely worthy sacrifice to take away our sins. **Jesus is merciful to those who've given or had abortions!** Christians, treat non-Christians with mercy like God treated you. Our mission isn't to establish a perfect society. Our mission is bringing the lost to maturity.

**Fourth**, public policy matters because it affects our quality of life.

For example, the recent ruling of *Carson v Makin* directly affects my family. I can now send my kids to Temple Academy with Maine footing the bill per the Supreme Court. If the state doesn't circumvent the ruling.

I don't want a society where righteousness is odd and sin is celebrated. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for God's will to be done on earth. So we celebrate the ruling and praise God for it.

**Fifth**, our positions on public policy should reflect biblical convictions.

God's word and God's word alone should shape our moral convictions, our stance on public policies. Maturity involves applying truth to issues of our day.

**Sixth**, while it isn't Palermo Christian Church's role to shape public policy, there are organizations that exist for such purposes (the Christian Civic League of Maine, Alliance Defending Freedom). And individual Christians may feel called to serve the betterment of our society by serving in roles that shape policy. We can all vote according to convictions rooted in God's word. A significant number of conversions in a concentrated area may reshape local policy. The gospel can change a society!

#### **Point 4: Paul's confidence: the new birth**

*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.* – 1:29

toil (1:29) = hard work that requires physical exertion like fishing, farming, or working with your hands. Paul's work requires exertion because of the obstacles involved.

struggle (1:29) = literally fighting, physical combat and figuratively an intense struggle. Paul toils for the gospel like a gladiator fighting to the death. He gives his all. He expends himself.

He toils "*to make the word of God fully known*" (1:25). A mystery = truth once hidden but now revealed. A mystery declared among the Gentiles. The mystery of Christ in you. In other words, the source of Paul's strength to fight with full exertion, to continue and not quit, to bear up under the pressure, to not give into selfishness is the presence of Jesus inside him.

Usually the Bible speaks of the indwelling Spirit, but sometimes speaks of Jesus dwelling in us (Gal 2:20). **The point is divine power outside of ourselves enables us to do what we couldn't do if left to ourselves.** Born again. Regeneration. Newness of life. Living waters. God working his good pleasure inside us. The

heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh. Divine enablement. This is the hope of the gospel. A new heart that can obey what Jesus commands. Completeness. Without lack. Bearing fruit.

It's all possible because Jesus is the one energizing and working powerfully within Paul. Is there hope for maturity? Absolutely. Can we change? Absolutely. I'm highlighting the source of Paul's strength. Christ in you.

Don't settle for I'm always going to be this way. Don't believe that lie. Believe that God's word accompanied by Christ in you yields remarkable results!

## **I'm 80**

Maybe you're saying I'm 80 years old. What's left for me?

- 1) Relationships to repair?
- 2) Lost to evangelize...do you have evangelism down?
- 3) Friendships to form?
- 4) Saints to encourage?
- 5) Wisdom to pass on?
- 6) How could you help Palermo Christian Church evangelize the lost and bring believers to greater maturity?

Complete Christians = a healthy church

- 7) Areas of your life untouched by God's Word? (unforgiveness, politics, etc.)

Complete means every area of life touched by God's Word! Christ in you makes this possible!

## **Conclusion**

**Follow Paul's example.**

**Paul's task: gospel to the nations.**

**Paul's method: teaching God's word.**

**Paul's goal: complete Christians.**

**Paul's confidence: the new birth.**