

JESUS CHRIST, OUR ALL IN ALL

A Study of Colossians

STUDY FOUR

A Precise Explanation of Ministry

Colossians 1:23–29

How valuable it is when we teach the truth to include exhortations regarding things that need to be corrected. People not only need the Lord. They also need to know the truth concerning the Lord. People in ministry not only need to be engaged in evangelism. We also need to be engaged in edification.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WORDS, like knives, often grow dull from constant use. This has occurred in words commonly used in Christian circles—like the word *ministry*. Its sharp, spiritual edge is beginning to blunt.

At its core, *ministry* means “service.” So, believers often use *ministry* because Jesus teaches us to value all people and consider them worthy of aid no matter the kind of aid: spiritual, physical, mental, emotional. A medical practice, teaching post, and caregiving vocation could each be a Christian *ministry* when a Christian improves others’ lives through useful, God-honoring service.

But Paul and the other New Testament writers had something more specific in mind with the word *ministry* when used in connection with Christ. In this narrow sense, *a Christian ministry serves Christ by proclaiming His message and helping His people grow in Him.*

Paul gets into the details of this kind of ministry in Colossians 1:23–29, our focus for this study. Pastor Chuck Swindoll carefully walks us through this passage because he doesn’t want us to thoughtlessly toss around the term and, as a result, dull its meaning. All Christians need a precise yet comprehensive understanding of this concept so we can improve our participation in it.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

In our passage, Paul claimed his dependence upon Jesus for gospel ministry: “That’s why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ’s mighty power that works within me.” (Colossians 1:29). We not only depend upon God for our energy to accomplish His work but also to understand His Word. So take a moment now to request the Spirit’s help in this study.

How gracious of God to give us His Book that is timeless and true. We can always count on this: When we open His Book, we will hear truth. Truth to learn and truth to live by. It’s no exception as we turn to this little letter written to the Colossians. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible, like nothing else, can bring stability to our lives, providing us a rock to stand on. God channels His divine power, via the Holy Spirit, to give us the benefits of knowing Him: comfort, peace, perseverance, joy, wisdom, and hope . . . to name a few. But acquiring these benefits requires us to learn His Word. Like Pastor Chuck says, “There is no shortcut to maturity. It comes slowly but surely to those who search the Scriptures.”¹

That’s why we take the time to learn just a small piece of God’s Word in each of these *Searching the Scriptures* Bible studies.



Observation: The Minister

Observation requires patience and steadiness but not stillness. Like fly-fishing in a mountain river, we must wait for the fish to bite, but must constantly pull back the rod and recast the fly to the perfect position.



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Observation, too, requires intentional, constant effort to see afresh and receive anew what God has to say through His Word. With that in mind, observe *Colossians 1:23–29*. Do so using multiple translations and by reading the passage aloud. Jot down your key observations from this passage.

Paul said God had appointed him to be His servant to proclaim the good news. What feature of that good news did Paul explain in *1:26–27*?

No message is truly complete if it does not include the name of Christ—the name that is above every name. Christ lives in you. Let Him be your identifying mark, Christ in you.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Toward what end did Paul’s proclamation serve (*Colossians 1:28*)?

As an apostle appointed by God, Paul zeroed in on his gospel stewardship, his mandate from God to “tell others about Christ” (1:28). Proclaiming, teaching, and warning became the top priorities of Paul’s life soon after the Lord called him into the ministry on the Damascus Road.



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Interpretation: A Ministry of Proclamation

Pastor Chuck highlighted five essentials of Paul’s ministry, requiring both our understanding and execution, if we want to follow in the apostle’s footsteps.

Suffering

Paul did not dodge suffering or count it an evil to be avoided at all cost. In his online commentary, Thomas Constable helpfully *summarizes* differing interpretations of Paul’s enigmatic words, “participating in the sufferings of Christ” (*Colossians 1:24*). Review how scholars have understood Colossians 1:24, and record what you think the verse means along with its significance for Christians today.

Proclaiming

In *Colossians 1:3–23*, Paul summarized the *divine message* he proclaimed throughout his ministry. God had made Paul’s priority the task of proclamation. What did Paul have in mind by using the word *proclaimed*? Consider to whom he made this proclamation and in what contexts (*Colossians 1:25*).



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Teaching and Warning

Paul followed his proclamation with consistent *teaching* and *warning*. Distinguish between these two terms. What did Paul mean by them (*Colossians 1:28*)? Consult netbible.org or Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*.

A ministry that does not include reproof, admonition—a kind of warning—is not a complete ministry. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Depending

Paul knew he did not work alone nor depend upon his own cunning or physical strength. God empowered him. Explain the meaning of *Colossians 1:29* and how this empowerment is significant for Christian ministry today.

Suffering. Proclaiming. Teaching. Warning. Depending. Five essential elements of faithful, authentic Christian ministry. Not only are these actions necessary to do the work, but they are sufficient to complete the work. Never doubt it!



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Correlation: Paul in Action

The evangelist Luke's second volume, Acts, comes to us as the first record from early church history—detailing the acts of God's Spirit through His apostles, with more than half of the book devoted to Paul's ministry. Acts 20:13–37 offers us a window to see Paul in action—how he performed his ministry.

Simply read through [Acts 20:13–37](#) a time or two. Note how Paul recounted his faithful stewardship. How did Paul model the five essentials we learned from [Colossians 1:23–29](#)?

When you read your Bible, pay attention to words. They are the building blocks of thought. And true thoughts lead to an understanding of God's truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Depending on Christ's Power

No matter your vocation, you are called to participate in Christian ministry at some level because you are a child of God. So, Pastor Chuck crafted four principles to help every Christian minister well.

1. *We're appointed as servants, not hired to hold a job.* Renewed lives and divine applause give us enough reward for our work.
2. *We're thankful for suffering, not resentful.* Suffering produces perseverance and proven character. In eternity, Christians will look back at their sacrifices and say, "Worth it!"
3. *We're telling everyone the secret, not keeping it to ourselves.* God has acted. He has spoken. The grace revolution happened on the cross. Now all are welcome to enjoy its benefits. God has chosen you to do the inviting.
4. *We're giving it our all, not holding back.* Fight sloth—ministry's great enemy. Service entails exertion, sometimes agonizing labor. Your work in the Lord is not in vain.



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Do any of these principles call you to action? If so, record below how you can strengthen your personal ministry by detailing your plan to better follow one or all of Pastor Chuck’s biblically based principles.

The beauty of God’s Word lies in its ability to speak to us personally. Do you sense the Spirit giving you a specific principle to follow? If so, write it down. Then, summarize how you want to implement it.

Paul kept a keen edge on the meaning of the word *ministry*. He spoke with precision and gave us an example to follow so we can do ministry with similar verve and effectiveness as the great apostle himself.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making me come to know the great secret—that a man scourged and crucified endured such agony for me that His pain might lead to my joy, that His death might lead to my life. With the demonstration of the Spirit’s power, He rose victorious. Now, the life I live, I do so by faith in the Son of God. Increase my faith that I might proclaim the gospel as Paul proclaimed it. Let my heart be like Yours. In Christ’s name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 14. Visit sts.insight.org to learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study.

