

CHAPTER 1

We have here,

- I.** The inscription, as usual (v. 1, 2).
- II.** His thanksgiving to God for what he had heard concerning them — their faith, love, and hope (v. 3-8).
- III.** His prayer for their knowledge, fruitfulness, and strength (v. 9-11).
- IV.** An admirable summary of the Christian doctrine concerning the operation of the Spirit, the person of the Redeemer, the work of redemption, and the preaching of it in the gospel (v. 12-29).

~~501~~ COLOSSIANS 1:1-2

INTRODUCTION

I. The inscription of this epistle is much the same with the rest; only it is observable that,

1. He calls himself an *apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. An apostle is a prime-minister in the kingdom of Christ, immediately called by Christ, and extraordinarily qualified; his work was peculiarly to plant the Christian church, and confirm the Christian doctrine. He attributes this not to his own merit, strength, or sufficiency; but to the free grace and good-will of God. He thought himself engaged to do his utmost, as an apostle, because he was made so by the will of God.

2. He joins Timothy in commission with himself, which is another instance of his humility; and, though he elsewhere calls him his son (~~501~~2 Timothy 2:1), yet here he calls him his brother, which is an example to the elder and more eminent ministers to look upon the younger and more obscure as their brethren, and to treat them accordingly with kindness and respect.

3. He calls the Christians at Colosse *saints, and faithful brethren in Christ*. As all good ministers, so all good Christians, are brethren one to another, who stand in a near relation and owe a mutual love. Towards God they must be saints, consecrated to his honour and sanctified by his grace, bearing his image and aiming at his glory. And in both these, as saints to God and as brethren to one another, they must be faithful. Faithfulness runs through every character and relation of the Christian life, and is the crown and glory of them all.

II. The apostolical benediction is the same as usual: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. He wishes them *grace and peace*, the free favour of God and all the blessed fruits of it; every kind of spiritual blessings, and that *from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*; jointly from both, and distinctly from each; as in the former epistle.

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8

PAUL'S THANKSGIVING FOR THE COLOSSIANS

Here he proceeds to the body of the epistle, and begins with thanksgiving to God for what he had heard concerning them, though he had no personal acquaintance with them, and knew their state and character only by the reports of others.

I. He gave thanks to God for them, that they had embraced the gospel of Christ, and given proofs of their fidelity to him. Observe, In his prayers for them he gave thanks for them. Thanksgiving ought to be a part of every prayer; and whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving. Observe,

1. Whom he gives thanks to: *To God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In our thanksgiving we must have an eye to God as God (he is the object of thanksgiving as well as prayer), and is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and through whom all good comes to us. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as our Father; and it is a matter of encouragement, in all our addresses to God, that we can look to him as Christ's Father and our Father, as his God and our God, ~~401~~ John 20:17. Observe,

2. What he gives thanks to God for — for the graces of God in them, which were evidences of the grace of God towards them: *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have to all the saints; for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven*, v. 4, 5. Faith, hope, and love, are the three principal graces in the Christian life, and proper matter of our prayer and thanksgiving.

(1.) He gives thanks for their faith in Christ Jesus, that they were brought to believe in him, and take upon them the profession of his religion, and venture their souls upon his undertaking.

(2.) For their love. Besides the general love which is due to all men, there is a particular love owing to the saints, or those who are of the Christian brotherhood, ^{<4027>}1 Peter 2:17. We must love all the saints, bear an extensive kindness and good-will to good men, notwithstanding smaller points of difference, and many real weaknesses. Some understand it of their charity to the saints in necessity, which is one branch and evidence of Christian love.

(3.) For their hope: *The hope which is laid up for you in heaven*, v. 5. The happiness of heaven is called their hope, because it is the *thing hoped for*, *looking for the blessed hope*, ^{<4023>}Titus 2:13. What is laid out upon believers in this world is much; but what is laid up for them in heaven is much more. And we have reason to give thanks to God for the hope of heaven which good Christians have, or their well-grounded expectation of the future glory. Their faith in Christ, and love to the saints, had an eye to the *hope laid up for them in heaven*. The more we fix our hopes on the recompence of reward in the other world, the more free and liberal shall we be of our earthly treasure upon all occasions of doing good.

II. Having blessed God for these graces, he blesses God for the means of grace which they enjoyed: *Wherein you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*. They had heard in the word of the truth of the gospel concerning this *hope laid up for them in heaven*. Observe,

1. The gospel is the word of truth, and what we may safely venture our immortal souls upon: it proceeds from the God of truth and the Spirit of truth, and is a faithful saying. He calls it *the grace of God in truth*, v. 6.

2. It is a great mercy to hear this word of truth; for the great thing we learn from it is the happiness of heaven. Eternal life is brought to light by the

gospel, ^{401D}2 Timothy 1:10. They heard of the hope laid up in heaven in the word of the truth of the gospel. “*Which has come unto you, as it hath to all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you,* v. 6. This gospel is preached and brings forth fruit in other nations; it has come to you, *as it hath to all the world,* according to the commission, *Go preach the gospel in all the nations, and to every creature.*” Observe,

(1.) All who hear the word of the gospel ought to bring forth the fruit of the gospel, that is, be obedient to it, and have their principles and lives formed according to it. This was the doctrine first preached: *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,* ^{408B}Matthew 3:8. And our Lord says, *If you know these things, happy are you if you do them,* ⁴⁸⁷John 13:17. Observe,

(2.) Wherever the gospel comes, it will bring forth fruit to the honour and glory of God: *It bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you.* We mistake, if we think to monopolize the comforts and benefits of the gospel to ourselves. Does the gospel bring forth fruit in us? So it does in others.

III. He takes this occasion to mention the minister by whom they believed (v. 7, 8): *As you also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.* He mentions him with great respect, to engage their love to him.

1. He calls him his fellow-servant, to signify not only that they served the same Master, but that they were engaged in the same work. They were fellow-labourers in the work of the Lord, though one was an apostle and the other an ordinary minister.

2. He calls him his dear fellow-servant: all the servants of Christ ought to love one another, and it is an endearing consideration that they are engaged in the same service.

3. He represents him as one who was a faithful minister of Christ to them, who discharged his trust and fulfilled his ministry among them. Observe, Christ is our proper Master, and we are his ministers. He does not say who is your minister; but *who is the minister of Christ for you.* It is by his authority and appointment, though for the people's service.

4. He represents him as one who gave them a good word: *Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit,* v. 8. He recommends him to their affection, from the good report he made of their sincere love to Christ and

all his members, which was wrought in them by the Spirit, and is agreeable to the spirit of the gospel. Faithful ministers are glad to be able to speak well of their people.

~~509~~ COLOSSIANS 1:9-11

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE COLOSSIANS

The apostle proceeds in these verses to pray for them. He heard that they were good, and he prayed that they might be better. He was constant in this prayer: *We do not cease to pray for you*. It may be he could hear of them but seldom, but he constantly prayed for them. — *And desire that you may be filled with the knowledge*, etc. Observe what it is that he begs of God for them,

I. That they might be knowing intelligent Christians: *filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*. Observe,

- 1.** The knowledge of our duty is the best knowledge. A mere empty notion of the greatest truths is insignificant. Our knowledge of the will of God must be always practical: we must know it, in order to do it.
- 2.** Our knowledge is then a blessing indeed when it is in wisdom, when we know how to apply our general knowledge to our particular occasions, and to suit it to all emergencies.
- 3.** Christians should endeavour to be filled with knowledge; not only to know the will of God, but to know more of it, and to *increase in the knowledge of God* (as it is v. 10), and to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour*, ~~685~~ 2 Peter 3:18.

II. That their conversation might be good. Good knowledge without a good life will not profit. Our understanding is then a spiritual understanding when we exemplify it in our way of living: *That you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* (v. 10), that is, as becomes the relation we stand in to him and the profession we make of him. The agreeableness of our conversation to our religion is pleasing to God as well as to good men. We walk unto all well-pleasing when we walk in all things according to the will of God. *Being fruitful in every good work*. This is what we should aim at. Good words will not do without good

works. We must abound in good works, and in every good work: not in some only, which are more easy, and suitable, and safe, but in all, and every instance of them. There must be a regular uniform regard to all the will of God. And the more fruitful we are in good works the more we shall *increase in the knowledge of God. He who doeth his will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God,* ^{<407>}John 7:17.

III. That they might be strengthened: *Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power* (v. 11), fortified against the temptations of Satan and furnished for all their duty. It is a great comfort to us that he who undertakes to give strength to his people is a God of power and of glorious power. Where there is spiritual life there is still need of spiritual strength, strength for all the actions of the spiritual life. To be strengthened is to be furnished by the grace of God for every good work, and fortified by that grace against every evil one: it is to be enabled to do our duty, and still to hold fast our integrity. The blessed Spirit is the author of this strength; for we are *strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inward man,* ^{<408>}Ephesians 3:16. The word of God is the means of it, by which he conveys it; and it must be fetched in by prayer. It was in answer to earnest prayer that the apostle obtained sufficient grace. In praying for spiritual strength we are not straitened in the promises, and therefore should not be straitened in our own hopes and desires. Observe,

- 1.** He prayed that they might be strengthened with might: this seems a tautology; but he means, that they might be mightily strengthened, or strengthened with might derived from another.
- 2.** It is with all might. It seems unreasonable that a creature should be strengthened with all might, for that is to make him *almighty*; but he means, with all that might which we have occasion for, to enable us to discharge our duty or preserve our innocence, that grace which is sufficient for us in all the trials of life and able to help us in time of need.
- 3.** It is *according to his glorious power*. He means, according to the grace of God: but the grace of God in the hearts of believers is the power of God; and there is a glory in this power; it is an excellent and sufficient power. And the communications of strength are not according to our weakness, to whom the strength is communicated, but according to his power, from whom it is received. When God gives he gives like himself, and when he strengthens he strengthens like himself.

4. The special use of this strength was for suffering work: *That you may be strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness*. He prays not only that they may be *supported* under their troubles, but *strengthened* for them: the reason is there is work to be done even when we are suffering. And those who are strengthened *according to his glorious power* are strengthened,

(1.) To all patience. When patience *hath its perfect work* (~~3006~~ James 1:4) then we are strengthened to all patience — when we not only bear our troubles patiently, but receive them as gifts from God, and are thankful for them. To you *it is given to suffer*, ~~3012~~ Philippians 1:29. When we bear our troubles well, though ever so many, and the circumstances of them ever so aggravating, then we bear them with all patience. And the same reason for bearing one trouble will hold for bearing another, if it be a good reason. All patience includes all the kinds of it; not only bearing patience, but waiting patience.

(2.) This is even unto long-suffering, that is, drawn out to a great length: not only to bear trouble awhile, but to bear it as long as God pleases to continue it.

(3.) It is with joyfulness, to rejoice in tribulation, to take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his name, to have joy as well as patience in the troubles of life. This we could never do by any strength of our own, but as we are strengthened by the grace of God.

~~3012~~ COLOSSIANS 1:12-29

THE REDEEMER'S DIGNITY

Here is a summary of the doctrine of the gospel concerning the great work of our redemption by Christ. It comes in here not as the matter of a sermon, but as the matter of a thanksgiving; for our salvation by Christ furnishes us with abundant matter of thanksgiving in every view of it: *Giving thanks unto the Father*, v. 12. He does not discourse of the work of redemption in the natural order of it; for then he would speak of the purchase of it first, and afterwards of the application of it. But here he inverts the order, because, in our sense and feeling of it, the application

goes before the purchase. We first find the benefits of redemption in our hearts, and then are led by those streams to the original and fountain-head. The order and connection of the apostle's discourse may be considered in the following manner: —

I. He speaks concerning the operations of the Spirit of grace upon us. We must give thanks for them, because by these we are qualified for an interest in the mediation of the Son: *Giving thanks to the Father*, etc. etc., v. 12, 13. It is spoken of as the work of the Father, because the Spirit of grace is the Spirit of the Father, and the Father works in us by his Spirit. Those in whom the work of grace is wrought must give thanks unto the Father. If we have the comfort of it, he must have the glory of it. Now what is it which is wrought for us in the application of redemption?

1. “He hath *delivered us from the power of darkness*, v. 13. He has rescued us from the state of heathenish darkness and wickedness. He hath saved us from the dominion of sin, which is darkness (⁴¹⁶1 John 1:6), from the dominion of Satan, who is the *prince of darkness* (⁴⁶²Ephesians 6:12), and from the damnation of hell, which is *utter darkness*,” (⁴⁵⁰Matthew 25:30. They are *called out of darkness*, ⁴⁰³1 Peter 2:9.

2. “He hath *translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*, brought us into the gospel-state, and made us members of the church of Christ, which is a state of light and purity.” *You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord*, (⁴⁸⁸Ephesians 5:8. *Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*, ⁴⁰³1 Peter 2:9. Those were made willing subjects of Christ who were the slaves of Satan. The conversion of a sinner is the translation of a soul into the kingdom of Christ out of the kingdom of the devil. The power of sin is shaken off, and the power of Christ submitted to. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes them free from the law of sin and death; and it is the kingdom of his dear Son, or the Son of his peculiar love, his beloved Son (⁴⁰⁷Matthew 3:17), and eminently the beloved, (⁴⁰⁶Ephesians 1:6.

3. “He hath not only done this, but hath *made us meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light*, v. 12. He hath prepared us for the eternal happiness of heaven, as the Israelites divided the promised land by lot; and has given us the earnest and assurance of it.” This he mentions first because it is the first indication of the future blessedness, that by the grace

of God we find ourselves in some measure prepared for it. God gives *grace and glory*, and we are here told what they both are.

(1.) What that glory is. It is the *inheritance of the saints in light*. It is an inheritance, and belongs to them as children, which is the best security and the sweetest tenure: *If children, then heirs*, ^{<487>}Romans 8:17. And it is an inheritance of the saints — proper to sanctified souls. Those who are not saints on earth will never be saints in heaven. And it is an inheritance in light; the perfection of knowledge, holiness, and joy, by communion with God, who is light, and the Father of lights, ^{<3017>}James 1:17; ^{<4015>}John 1:5.

(2.) What this grace is. It is a meetness for the inheritance: “*He hath made us meet to be partakers*, that is, suited and fitted us for the heavenly state by a proper temper and habit of soul; and he makes us meet by the powerful influence of his Spirit.” It is the effect of the divine power to change the heart, and make it heavenly. Observe, All who are designed for heaven hereafter are prepared for heaven now. As those who live and die unsanctified go out of the world with their hell about them, so those who are sanctified and renewed go out of the world with their heaven about them. Those who have the inheritance of sons have the education of sons and the disposition of sons: they *have the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father*. ^{<485>}Romans 8:15. *And, because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*, ^{<406>}Galatians 4:6. This meetness for heaven is the earnest of the Spirit in our heart, which is part of payment, and assures the full payment. Those who are sanctified shall be glorified (^{<483>}Romans 8:30), and will be for ever indebted to the grace of God, which hath sanctified them.

II. Concerning the person of the Redeemer. Glorious things are here said of him; for blessed Paul was full of Christ, and took all occasions to speak honourably of him. He speaks of him distinctly as God, and as Mediator.

1. As God he speaks of him, v. 15-17.

(1.) He is the *image of the invisible God*. Not as man was made in the *image of God* (^{<007>}Genesis 1:27), in his natural faculties and dominion over the creatures: no, he is the *express image of his person*, ^{<3013>}Hebrews 1:3. He is so the image of God as the son is the image of his father, who has a natural likeness to him; so that he who has seen him has *seen the Father*, and his *glory was the glory of the only-begotten of the Father*, ^{<414>}John 1:14; 14:9.

(2.) He is the *first-born of every creature*. Not that he is himself a creature; for it is *prototokos pases ktiseos* — *born or begotten before all the creation*, or before any creature was made, which is the scripture-way of representing eternity, and by which the eternity of God is represented to us: *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was; when there was no depth, before the mountains were settled, while as yet he had not made the earth,* ^{<4083>}Proverbs 8:23-26. It signifies his dominion over all things, as the first-born in a family is heir and lord of all, so he is the *heir of all things*, ^{<8002>}Hebrews 1:2. The word, with only the change of the accent, *prototokos*, signifies actively the first begetter or producer of all things, and so it well agrees with the following clause. *Vid. Isidor. Peleus. epist. 30 lib. 3.*

(3.) He is so far from beginning himself a creature that he is the Creator: *For by him were all things created, which are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible*, v. 16. He made all things out of nothing, the highest angel in heaven, as well as men upon earth. He made the world, the upper and lower world, with all the inhabitants of both. *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made which was made,* ^{<8003>}John 1:3. He speaks here as if there were several orders of angels: *Whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers*, which must signify either different degrees of excellence or different offices and employments. *Angels, authorities, and powers,* ^{<6022>}1 Peter 3:22. Christ is the eternal wisdom of the Father, and the world was made in wisdom. He is the eternal Word, and the world was made by the word of God. He is the *arm of the Lord*, and the world was made by that arm. *All things are created by him and for him; di' autou kai eis auton.* Being created by him, they were created for him; being made by his power, they were made according to his pleasure and for his praise. He is the end, as well as the cause of all things. *To him are all things,* ^{<6116>}Romans 11:36; *eis auton ta panta.*

(4.) He *was before all things*. He had a being before the world was made, before the beginning of time, and therefore from all eternity. Wisdom was with the Father, and possessed by him in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old, ^{<4082>}Proverbs 8:22. And in the beginning the Word was with God and was God, ^{<8001>}John 1:1. He not only had a being before he was born of the virgin, but he had a being before all time.

(5.) *By him all things consist*. They not only subsist in their beings, but consist in their order and dependences. He not only created them all at

first, but it is by the word of his power that they are still upheld, ^{<300>}Hebrews 1:3. The whole creation is kept together by the power of the Son of God, and made to consist in its proper frame. It is preserved from disbanding and running into confusion.

2. The apostle next shows what he is as Mediator, v. 18, 19.

(1.) He is the *head of the body the church*: not only a head of government and direction, as the king is the head of the state and has right to prescribe laws, but a head of vital influence, as the head in the natural body: for all grace and strength are derived from him: and the church is his body, *the fulness of him who filleth all in all*, ^{<402>}Ephesians 1:22, 23.

(2.) He is the *beginning, the first-born from the dead, arche, prototokos* — the principle, the first-born from the dead; the principle of our resurrection, as well as the first-born himself. All our hopes and joys take their rise from him who is the author of our salvation. Not that he was the first who ever rose from the dead, but the first and only one who rose by his own power, and was *declared to be the Son of God, and Lord of all things*. And he is the head of the resurrection, and has given us an example and evidence of our resurrection from the dead. He rose as the first-fruits, ^{<450>}1 Corinthians 15:20.

(3.) He hath in *all things the pre-eminence*. It was the will of the Father that he should have *all power in heaven and earth*, that he might be preferred above angels and all the powers in heaven (he has *obtained a more excellent name than they*, ^{<304>}Hebrews 1:4), and that in all the affairs of the kingdom of God among men he should have the pre-eminence. He has the pre-eminence in the hearts of his people above the world and the flesh; and by giving him the pre-eminence we comply with the Father's will, That *all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father*, ^{<453>}John 5:23.

(4.) All fulness dwells in him, and it pleased the Father it should do so (v. 19), not only a fulness of abundance for himself, but redundance for us, a fulness of merit and righteousness, of strength and grace. As the head is the seat and source of the animal spirits, so is Christ of all graces to his people. *It pleased the Father* that all fulness should dwell in him; and we may have free resort to him for all that grace for which we have occasion. He not only intercedes for it, but is the trustee in whose hands it is lodged to dispense to us: *Of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace*, grace in

us answering to that grace which is in him (⁴⁰¹⁶John 1:16), and *he fills all in all*, ⁴⁰²³Ephesians 1:23.

III. Concerning the work of redemption. He speaks of the nature of it, or wherein it consists; and of the means of it, by which it was procured.

1. Wherein it consists. It is made to lie in two things: —

(1.) In the remission of sin: *In whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins*, v. 14. It was sin which sold us, sin which enslaved us: if we are redeemed, we must be redeemed from sin; and this is by forgiveness, or remitting the obligation to punishment. So ⁴⁰⁰⁷Ephesians 1:7, *In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

(2.) In reconciliation to God. God by him *reconciled all things to himself*, v. 20. He is the Mediator of reconciliation, who procures peace as well as pardon for sinners, who brings them into a state of friendship and favour at present, and will bring all holy creatures, angels as well as men, into one glorious and blessed society at last: *things in earth, or things in heaven*. So ⁴⁰¹⁰Ephesians 1:10, *He will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth*. The word is *anakephalaaiosasthai* — *he will bring them all under one head*. The Gentiles, who were alienated, and *enemies in their minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*, v. 21. Here see what was their condition by nature, and in their Gentile state — estranged from God, and at enmity with God: and yet this *enmity is slain*, and, notwithstanding this distance, we are now reconciled. Christ has laid the foundation for our reconciliation; for he has paid the price of it, has purchased the proffer and promise of it, proclaims it as a prophet, applies it as a king. Observe, The greatest enemies to God, who have stood at the greatest distance and bidden him defiance, may be reconciled, if it be not their own fault.

2. How the redemption is procured: *it is through his blood* (v. 14); he has *made peace through the blood of his cross* (v. 20), and it is *in the body of his flesh through death*, v. 22. It was the *blood which made an atonement, for the blood is the life; and without the shedding of blood there is no remission*, ⁴⁰²²Hebrews 9:22. There was such a value in the blood of Christ that, on account of Christ's shedding it, God was willing to deal with men upon new terms to bring them under a covenant of grace, and *for his sake*,

and in consideration of his death upon the cross, to pardon and accept to favour all who comply with them.

IV. Concerning the preaching of this redemption. Here observe,

1. To whom it was preached: *To every creature under heaven* (v. 23), that is, it was ordered to be preached to every creature, ^{<4165>}Mark 16:15. It may be preached to every creature; for the gospel excludes none who do not exclude themselves. More or less it has been or will be preached to every nation, though many have sinned away the light of it and perhaps some have never yet enjoyed it.

2. By whom it was preached: *Whereof I Paul am made a minister*. Paul was a great apostle; but he looks upon it as the highest of his titles of honour to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul takes all occasions to speak of his office; for he *magnified his office*, ^{<4113>}Romans 11:13. And again in v. 25, *Whereof I am made a minister*. Observe here,

(1.) Whence Paul had his ministry: it was *according to the dispensation of God which was given to him* (v. 25), the economy or wise disposition of things in the house of God. He was steward and master-builder, and this was given to him: he did not usurp it, nor take it to himself; and he could not challenge it as a debt. He received it from God as a gift, and took it as a favour.

(2.) For whose sake he had his ministry: *“It is for you, for your benefit: ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake,* ^{<4015>}2 Corinthians 4:5. We are Christ's ministers for the good of his people, to *fulfil the word of God* (that is, fully to preach it), of which you will have the greater advantage. The more we fulfil our ministry, or fill up all the parts of it, the greater will be the benefit of the people; they will be the more filled with knowledge, and furnished for service.”

(3.) What kind of preacher Paul was. This is particularly represented.

[1.] He was a suffering preacher: *Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you*, v. 24. He suffered in the cause of Christ, and for the good of the church. He suffered for preaching the gospel to them. And, while he suffered in so good a cause, he could rejoice in his sufferings, *rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer*, and esteem it an honour to him. *And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh*. Not that the afflictions of Paul, or any other, were expiations for sin, as the sufferings

of Christ were. There was nothing wanting in them, nothing which needed to *be filled up*. They were perfectly sufficient to answer the intention of them, the satisfaction of God's justice, in order to the salvation of his people. But the sufferings of Paul and other good ministers made them conformable to Christ; and they followed him in his suffering state: so they are said to fill up what was behind of the sufferings of Christ, as the wax fills up the vacuities of the seal, when it receives the impression of it. Or it may be meant not of Christ's sufferings, but of his suffering for Christ. He *filled that which was behind*. He had a certain rate and measure of suffering for Christ assigned him; and, as his sufferings were agreeable to that appointment, so he was still filling up more and more what was behind, or remained of them to his share.

[2.] He was a close preacher: he preached not only in public, but *from house to house*, from person to person. *Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom*, v. 28. Every man has need to be warned and taught, and therefore let every man have his share. Observe, *First*, When we warn people of what they do amiss, we must teach them to do better: warning and teaching must go together. *Secondly*, Men must be warned and taught in all wisdom. We must choose the fittest seasons, and use the likeliest means, and accommodate ourselves to the different circumstances and capacities of those we have to do with, and teach them as they are able to bear. That which he aimed at was to *present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, teleios*, either perfect in the knowledge of the Christian doctrine (*Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded*, ^{<5085>}Philippians 3:15; ^{<5087>}2 Timothy 3:17), or else crowned with a glorious reward hereafter, when he will *present to himself a glorious church* (^{<4827>}Ephesians 5:27), and bring them to the *spirits of just men made perfect*, ^{<5023>}Hebrews 12:23. Observe, Ministers ought to aim at the improvement and salvation of every particular person who hears them. *Thirdly*, He was a laborious preacher, and one who took pains: he was no loiterer, and did not do his work negligently (v. 29): *Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily*. He laboured and strove, used great diligence and contended with many difficulties, according to the measure of grace afforded to him and the extraordinary presence of Christ which was with him. Observe, As Paul laid out himself to do much good, so he had this favour, that the power of God wrought in him the more effectually. The more we labour in the work of the Lord the greater measures of help we may expect from him in it

(~~ARE~~ Ephesians 3:7): *According to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power.*

3. The gospel which was preached. We have an account of this: *Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints*, v. 26, 27. Observe,

(1.) The mystery of the gospel was long hidden: it was concealed from ages and generations, the several ages of the church under the Old-Testament dispensation. They were in a state of minority, and training up for a more perfect state of things, and could not look to the end of those things which were ordained, (~~ARE~~ 2 Corinthians 3:13.

(2.) This mystery now, in the fulness of time, is made manifest to the saints, or clearly revealed and made apparent. The veil which was over Moses's face is done away in Christ, (~~ARE~~ 2 Corinthians 3:14. The meanest saint under the gospel understands more than the greatest prophets under the law. He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they. *The mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*, (~~ARE~~ Ephesians 3:4, 5. And what is this mystery? It is the riches of God's glory among the Gentiles. The peculiar doctrine of the gospel was a mystery which was before hidden, and is now made manifest and made known. But the great mystery here referred to is the breaking down of the partition-wall between the Jew and Gentile, and preaching the gospel to the Gentile world, and making those partakers of the privileges of the gospel state who before lay in ignorance and idolatry: *That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers together of his promise in Christ by the gospel*, (~~ARE~~ Ephesians 3:6. This mystery, thus made known, *is Christ in you* (or among you) *the hope of glory*. Observe, Christ is the hope of glory. The ground of our hope is Christ in the word, or the gospel revelation, declaring the nature and methods of obtaining it. The evidence of our hope is Christ in the heart, or the sanctification of the soul, and its preparation for the heavenly glory.

4. The duty of those who are interested in this redemption: *If you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard*, v. 23. We must continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel; that is, we must be so well fixed in our minds as not to be moved from it by any temptations. We must be steadfast and immovable (~~ARE~~ 1 Corinthians

15:58) and *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,*

⌘ Hebrews 10:23. Observe, We can expect the happy end of our faith only when we continue in the faith, and are so far grounded and settled in it as not to be moved from it. We must not *draw back unto perdition*, but *believe unto the saving of the soul*, ⌘ Hebrews 10:39. We must be faithful to death, through all trials, that we may receive the *crown of life*, and *receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls*, ⌘ 1 Peter 1:9.