

## Colossians 1:24-29 part 2

*<sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Here is the outline for this last section of Colossians one.

1. The Purpose
2. The Pillar
3. The Process
4. The Power

Last Sunday we only tackled the first point—the Purpose. The question we asked was this: what is maturity? What is telios? How do we know when our faith is complete and finished? Let me remind you of our outline and a summary of what we covered.

There were a few answers to this question.

1. Spiritual maturity is defined as bearing fruit. According to John 15, all believers bear some fruit but what Jesus wants is much fruit. Paul opened his letter to the Colossians by telling them that they were already bearing fruit but wanted them to know that they could bear much fruit.
2. Spiritual fruit is nothing less than obeying all that Jesus has commanded us. The bar is set very high.

3. All of Jesus commands can be put into 3 categories: Abide, Love and Proclaim.
4. Fruit is defined in 2 basic ways. Remember the two types of fruit from an apple tree? The fruit of an apple tree is apples and more apples trees. In this analogy, more apples represents more spiritual fruit in our lives. Our obedience and walk with Christ matures over time. More apples trees means more disciples. But even here you could say that there are 3 steps in the process.
  - a. We grow as disciples.
  - b. We teach others to grow as disciples. This is ministry addition.
  - c. We train others to train others. This is ministry multiplication.
5. All believers should increase in fruit but not everyone has to have the same amount of fruit. Remember that Jesus said that some soil would produce a hundredfold crop, others sixty and others thirty.
6. Spiritual fruit brings great joy. At the close of the vine and the branches teaching, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). This is one of the most powerful lessons any believer can learn. Whatever brings God the most glory also brings us the most joy. If we could understand and truly believe this one fact, I think most of our lives would be radically different than they are.

Speaking of joy and spiritual fruit, Karen and I experienced a tremendous amount of joy the past two weeks working with the Foundation Camp leaders. After our time together, each of them shared a way they had grown over our two weeks. It may be difficult to get a full picture of what spiritual maturity can look like but I can say with confidence that this is what the maturing process looks like.

- I have become more confident in my eternal security and the joy I have in abiding with Christ.
- I have been convicted about how much I complain and how I need others to regularly and lovingly rebuke me.
- I came here thinking I only struggled with a few sins that were “manageable”. I now realize my utter sinfulness and my true need for Christ at all times.
- At the end of the day what I truly deserve is death, but God has given me eternal life through Jesus. This has increased my gratitude and decreased my complaining.
- I learned that the opposite of sin is worship and that to address the idols in my heart, I need to combat them with worship and instruction from the Scriptures.
- I am letting go of my bitterness toward my dad.
- I am encouraged by the fact that we have been born again for battle—battle against sin and fighting for one another.
- I now understand that my sinful behaviors and emotions stem from a wrong understanding about who God is and who I am in Christ. I need others around me in a deeper way to maintain this awareness and growth.
- I see that the idols of my heart—the sin beneath my outer sin—is caused by unbelief. I need to regularly repent of my unbelief and actively believe the truth.

Isn't that a wonderful list? We did not do this. We only had a total of eight hours with them but hopefully we had a small part in their overall experience. Not only do these nine people get more joy but Karen and I received the joy by watching spiritual fruit grow. The purpose for your life, the very reason you exist and have breath of life is to bear much fruit, and by so doing, glorify God.

## 2. Pillar

The summary phrase for point #2 is verse 27: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. The miracle that Christ dwells in all believers and that we dwell "in Christ," is the pillar and foundation of a spiritual fruit. What does it mean to be "in Christ" or that Christ is "in you"? This is what we usually called our identity in Christ and this is what Jesus meant by abiding in him. Abiding is being rooted in Christ, which is the source of all life in the living vine.

There are two fundamental questions that are answered by understanding your identity in Christ: Do I matter? and Do I belong? These two questions form the essence of who are and what we do. Most of our life is spent looking for answers to these questions and most of our sin happens when we look for the answers in all the wrong places. Thankfully, both of these questions are answered in Jesus finished work on our behalf.

Do you matter? First of all, you were made in the image of God. This is what gives all people significance. You did not crawl out of the primordial ooze. Or as Ken Ham puts it, you did not go "from goo to you by way of the zoo." God himself created you and stamped his image upon you. The image of God is what makes you human and what makes you significant. But because we are sinners by nature and by choice, we all inherited a fallen image that needed to be rescued and redeemed.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This magnificent verse is often used incorrectly. According to this verse, what is God's motivation for sending his Son to die for us? Love, right? "But God demonstrates his own love for us." The Father was motivated by love when he sent his Son and the Son was motivated by love when he willingly was sent. But here is where we too often confuse our self-image with our God-image.

For example, there is a song I used to hear on Christian radio that had some interesting lyrics.

If you were the only one,  
he still would have done just what he's done.  
He still would have sent his Son,  
if you were the only one.

There's a Ray Boltz song with similar lyrics.

I believe  
That He'd have done the same  
For only one

For only one  
He would have died  
For only one  
You are the one  
You are the one  
You are the one

Do you see any potential issues with these lyrics? Of course there is nothing wrong with trying to sing about God's love for us but I believe these songs have subtly changed the meaning of verses like Romans 5:8. It is very easy to convey the idea that Jesus died for us because we were so lovable. These lyrics turn the infinite love and sacrifice of King Jesus into a sappy love song. They are no doubt well-intentioned, but they seriously miss the mark.

The problem is that we view the love of God through the lens of human love. If a person shows us love at any level, there is an inescapable sense that we deserved to be loved. In other words, they loved us because there was something within us that was lovable. We were good enough to have earned their love. We were significant enough to have received their love. When you get to be old enough, everyone will experience rejection in human relationships. It is simply inevitable and when that happens, we wonder "Why did this person reject me? Why did they stop loving me?" and almost every time we ask that question, the deeper question of our hearts is this: "What is wrong with me that would cause this person to stop loving me? What did I do wrong? Why am I not good enough to be loved by them?" This might only happen a few times in your life or it might happen hundreds of times. This question becomes the source of all relational trauma. The more often it happens the more a person is traumatized by it. "What is wrong with me?" very quickly turns into a deep-seated belief that we are worthless, that no one could ever love us because at our core, we are unlovable.

So this is the human kind of love that we transfer to God and assume they are the same. This is why we end up with sappy love songs that tell us that Jesus would have died for us "if we were the only one" on the face of the earth. Maybe not everyone will interpret the song this way, but it tends to communicate some inherent value within us that made us so lovable. We were so significant that Jesus would have died just for us. But this is not at all what Romans 5:8 is saying. Let's look at it again.

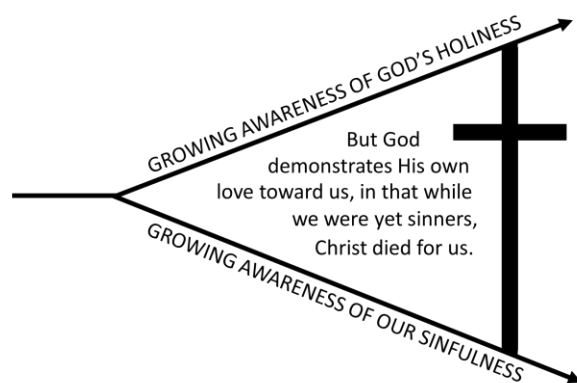
"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

What is God demonstrating here? He is demonstrating his own love. He is putting his love on display. Think about the most beautiful sunset you have ever seen. How many of you looked at such blazing beauty and thought, "Wow, I am really special. Look how wonderful, how lovable how significant I am to stand here and see this breathtaking sight." Anyone ever feel that way? Of course not, that is just silly nonsense. When we look at sunsets or the Grand Canyon or a fjord in Norway, no one ever gets prideful. No one is ever tempted to take credit for these things.

The only thoughts we have about self is how fortunate we are to see them or be there. We are caught up in the immense beauty and wonder of the other thing—of that which is outside of

ourselves because we understand that the beauty is on display is not earned. we don't feel more significant, in fact we often feel less significant when we are swallowed up in great magnitudes of awe and wonder. Even atheists can have a sense of reverence at such times and as believers, our mind usually focus on God and his creative genius. Is this not the essence of worship, to be feel as if we are being swallowed up by something or someone who is much greater than us?

Are you starting to see the difference between and man-centered view of God's love and a God-centered view of God's love? A man-centered view of God's love believes that Jesus loved us because we were lovable. But a God-centered view of God's love believes that God loved us because his love is so great. "But God demonstrated his love..." He put his love on display and the reason his love is so grand and so glorious is because he displayed his love "while we were still sinners." An enemy is not lovable. And the fact that we were enemies makes his love all the more grand.



I can't help it. I have to go back to the cross chart for this. Two things to mention here. One, Romans 5:8 fits nicely in here. The cross is the demonstration of God's love. Second, do not forget that both arrows continue on to infinity. Instead of the former weak song lyrics, among others, I vastly prefer these.

I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross.

No, we will never know fully, but it is worth our time to continually dig deeper. I believe that the love of Christ was so demonstrated on the cross that we will be comprehending the cross for all eternity.

So what I am saying is that our significance is not dependent on how lovable we were but on how loving God is. In every way possible, we are swallowed up in this love and our significance becomes intertwined with his love. Do you see? Because we were not worthy of his love, it not only makes his love all the more amazing, but it also answers the question, Do I matter? Yes you do, because Jesus did this for you. You have inherited worth and that worth is immeasurable. Your significance is not dependent on what other people think about you. It's not dependent on anything except what Christ has done for you.

About twenty years ago I wrote a [personal mission statement](#) and eight life values. By God's grace I have seen these grow in my life in the past twenty years. See if you recognize my significance in this mission statement.

I am in a lifelong pursuit of increasing in the knowledge and experience of Christ's intimate love for me and out of gratitude and humility serving Christ by leading others toward this same pursuit.

From where am I seeking my significance? From a “a lifelong pursuit of increasing in the knowledge and experience of Christ’s intimate love for me.” If you are a believer, you should understand the basics of the gospel. The God-man Jesus Christ died in your place for your sins and rose from the dead. But this basic knowledge is just the beginning. I want my significance to be swallowed up by the Love of Christ.

Now to answer the other question, do you belong? Once you have the first question answered the other one follows quickly behind it. Here’s a belonging chart that may be helpful.

REJECTION (Known, not Loved)	BELONGING (Known and Loved)
IGNORED & REJECTED (Not Known, not loved)	FITTING IN (Not Known, Loved)

We can feel all of these quadrants are true of us at various times and various circumstances. But the important thing to remember that neither your significance nor your belonging is ever based on circumstances. All believers are connected to the vine. Abiding in the vine is belonging. That’s because we are connected to the vine. And this is no mere analogy. Remember last week how we learned that God created living things for the purpose of expressing the kingdom of God. When Jesus used the vine imagery—although we are not literal vines and branches—we are no less connected. We form a single, living entity with Christ.

Do you matter? Do you belong? We have Christ in us, the hope of glory, so the answer to both questions is a resounding yes. Do you see how this sense of significance and belonging is the pillar and foundation of all spiritual fruit? If we don’t have a clear, Biblical answer to these questions, one of 2 things are likely to happen.

We won’t do ministry and won’t seek to be more fruitful. If you don’t have confidence in your secure position in the Lord then what is your motivation for wanting to bear more fruit? The other thing that can happen is that we will seek to be more fruitful, but for the wrong reasons. You will work hard to gain favor with the Lord and you will feel like it is never enough.

Also, almost all of our sin results from seeking significance and belonging in the wrong places. And they never satisfy so we can seek after them. When this happens long enough the sin turns into an addiction.

You belong. You matter. You have Christ in you, the hope of glory. This is already true of you so you need only to believe it.

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