



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

## Remaining Stable and Firm

Colossians 1.24 —2.5

David Anguish

### *Review: Written to Encourage*

1. As we see in several of his letters, Paul knew that disciples in the churches needed to be encouraged.
  - a. As adherents of a new, unapproved, faith, they were outsiders in the Roman world.
  - b. They were a tiny misunderstood minority who, as time went on, were increasingly ridiculed, ostracized, and persecuted.
  - c. They were learning a new way to live, with expectations 180 degrees from their former lives.
  - d. They had to learn to carry on when the newness wore off.
  - e. Some, like the Colossians, were challenged by proponents of ideas that distorted true teaching, some of which demanded they follow practices that made it more burdensome.
2. It is significant, then, that Paul begins Colossians by emphasizing ideas they needed for motivation.
  - a. He commends them for responding to “the truth of the gospel” and beginning well (Col 1.3–8).
  - b. He assures them God will be with them as they applied the teaching to life (1.9–12).
  - c. He reminds them that God had given them a new status (1.13–14).
  - d. He reinforces their understanding of Christ’s nature, authority, and ability to sustain creation itself (1.15–20).
  - e. He emphasizes that they had what was necessary to be “present[ed] holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (1.21–22).

### *Condition: Remaining Firmly Stable*

3. But there was a condition: “if indeed you continue [remain, NET] in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (1.23).
  - a. The Greek construction—the conjunction (εἰ, *ei*), emphatic particle (γε, *ge*), and present tense verb (ἐπιμένετε, *epimenete*)—emphasizes that faithfulness should be ongoing over time.
  - b. Two modifying words reinforce that expectation:
    - 1) “Stable” (θεμελιόω, *themelioō*): “to provide a base for some material object or structure, *lay a foundation, found*” (Bauer 2000, 449).
      - a) The plural perfect passive participle form indicates a prior commitment that continues in the present for the community of believers.

- 2) “Steadfast” (ἔδραϊος, *hedraios*; “firm” NET), an adjective, refers to perseverance.
  - a) Further explained as “not shifting” (μετακινέω, *metakineo*), a present participle that reinforces the idea of ongoing stability and steadfastness.

#### *What Firm Stability Entails: An Overview (1.24–2.5)*

4. The next two paragraphs (1.24–2.5) elaborate on the expectation of the goal of firm stability in 1.23; they demonstrate an increasing intensification of the main themes; a chiasmic outline illuminates (Garland 1998, 117).
  - A: Paul’s *sufferings* for them for the sake of Christ’s body (1.24)
    - B: Paul’s *commission*: to present the word of God in fullness (1.25a-c).
      - C: Paul’s *message*: the glorious riches of the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory (1.25d–27).
        - B: Carrying out the apostle’s *commission*: proclaiming, warning, and teaching with all wisdom to present everyone mature in Christ (1.28).
    - A: Paul’s toil and *struggle*, empowered by Christ (1.29).
      - A: Paul’s *struggle* for them, even when they had not seen him “face to face” (“in the flesh”) (2.1).
        - B: Paul’s *commission*: to encourage and bring complete understanding (2.2a).
          - C: Paul’s *message*: the mystery of God, namely, Christ (2.2b–3).
        - B: Paul’s *commission*: to prevent them from being deceived by fine-sounding arguments (2.4).
      - A: Paul’s [toiling, *struggling*] presence with them in spirit though absent in the body (2.5).

#### *Stability Entails: Being Suffering Servants, Going against the Grain of the Present Age (1.24–2.5, 29; 2.1)*

5. Notice the repetition of the suffering and service themes in 1.24–2.5, 29; 2.1.
 

a. Sufferings (πάθημα, <i>pathēma</i> ) (1.24).	d. Toil/labor (κοπιάω, <i>kopiaō</i> ) (1.29).
b. Afflictions (θλίψις, <i>thlipsis</i> ) (1.24).	e. Struggling (ἀγωνίζομαι, <i>agōnizomai</i> ) (1.29).
c. Servant/minister (διάκονος, <i>diakonos</i> ) (1.25).	f. Struggle (ἄγών, <i>agōn</i> ) (2.1).
6. Verse 24 is complex; translated literally, it reads: “Now I rejoice in the sufferings on your [plural] behalf and I am filling up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh on behalf of his body, which is the church.”
7. The idea of filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions has puzzled commentators; “how can there be anything lacking in the sufferings of Christ?” (Wright 1986, 87)
  - a. That Paul cannot mean something is lacking in the reconciling and presenting-as-holy work of Christ is evident from what he wrote in 1.15–22.
  - b. From other texts, we see that he probably intends to point to the expectation of suffering service that began with Jesus, a conclusion confirmed by the servant emphasis in verse 25.
8. As part of the “stewardship [οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*] from God, or, to use Paul’s words elsewhere, the grace received from God (cf. Rom 1.5; 12.3; 15.15; 1 Cor 3.10; Gal 2.9), it is expected that his followers will be “suffering servants,” like Jesus into whose image (εἰκόν, *eikōn*) we are being transformed (μεταμορφόω, *metamorphoō*) (2 Cor 3.18; cf. Col 1.15 for *eikōn*).
  - a. Jesus calls us to imitate his self-denial in Mark 8.31–38.
  - b. He models and calls us to be *diakonoi* willing to share his “cup” and “baptism” of suffering, in Mark 10.38–39, 42–45, immediately after the third prediction of his passion in vv. 32–34.
  - c. Elsewhere, Paul refers to the expectation that we will share in Christ’s sufferings (cf. Rom 8.17; 2

Cor 1.5–6; 4.10–12; Phil 1.29; 3.10 [κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων, *koinōnian tōn pathēmatōn*]; 1 Pet 4.13).

9. Verse 29 more specifically defines what this meant for Paul (and by extension all believers).
  - a. Toil (*kopiaō*) – “to be tired or weary, as the result of hard or difficult endeavor” (Louw & Nida 1989, 260).
  - b. Struggling (*agōnizomai*) – “to engage in intense struggle, involving physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition—‘to struggle, to fight’” (Louw & Nida 1989, 496); here a present middle participle.
  - c. Both were “according to his [Christ’s] energy [ἐνέργειαν, *energeian*], being energized [ἐνεργουμένην, *energoumenēn*; present participle] with power [ἐν δυνάμει, *en dynamēi*]” (literal translation).
  - d. 2.1 adds that this was the way Paul approached his ministry everywhere (note the word, “struggle,” *agōn*).
10. These comments by David Garland remind us how out of step with culture the idea of the fellowship of suffering with Jesus is:

Today, most people view pain and suffering as a curse. They resent it when it invades their lives and make every effort to keep it at bay. Inadvertently perhaps, the medical community has led us to believe that physical suffering can be alleviated if we spend enough money for the right treatment....

In today’s world we expect people to rejoice in their accomplishments, their blessings, their peace, their health and wealth. Consequently, Paul’s rejoicing over his suffering jolts a worldview that values comfort and ease as the highest good. We should note that Paul does not say that he rejoices in spite of his sufferings but *in them*. He does not rejoice after the trials are over but *during* them. The apostle obviously did not view his suffering as a problem or as something to be escaped, as we moderns might. Nor did it engender the resentment, hatred, despair, hopelessness, or cynicism that so often accompany travail. Paul accepted suffering as the call of God, and this call led him to look at things from a new perspective.

... He understood that his apostleship involved “work to be done and sufferings to be borne if the body of Christ is to be built up and the life of Christ to be diffused to new members” (Garland 1998, 127–128).<sup>1</sup>

*Stability Entails: Servants Who Prioritize Christ’s Way in Teaching and Nurture (1.25, 28; 2.2, 4)*

11. The word of God (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *ton logon tou theou*) is integral to the stewardship Paul received from God (v. 25).
  - a. Presentation of the word of God, i.e., the good news that his promises had been fulfilled in Christ, was a consistent point of emphasis in Paul’s letters (Rom 9.6; 2 Cor 2.17; 4.2; 2 Tim 2.9).
  - b. But we should be careful not to read and study the word selectively, or to try to reshape it to fit our preconceptions rather than allowing it to challenge and shape us (Garland 1998, 134).<sup>2</sup>
  - c. As Garland observes, the information age presents us with a special challenge: “The proliferation of ersatz truth in our world today makes it all the more imperative that the church present the world with the truth revealed in Jesus Christ” (Garland 1998, 134).

<sup>1</sup> The quotation in the last line is from Barnabas Mary Ahern, “The Fellowship of His Sufferings (Phil 3, 10): A Study of Paul’s Doctrine on Christian Suffering,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960): 28.

<sup>2</sup> Garland (1998, 134) tells of a preacher who addressed this selectivity issue by entitling his sermon, “This Is the Lord that the Day Hath Made.”

12. In 1.28 and 2.4, Paul states the goal of his mission, its process, and the audience it was to impact.
- a. The goal: “that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”
    - 1) “Mature” (τέλειος, *teleios*) defined: “free from any deficiency, omission, or corruption’, *complete, perfect*” (Danker 2009, 349).
    - 2) Garland suggests a more nuanced Hebrew understanding: “something was ‘perfect’ if it fulfilled its purpose” (Garland 1998, 124).
    - 3) Since God intends for us to “be holy as he is holy” (1 Pet 1.15–16; cf. Heb 12.10), we should be careful not to water down the goal, to relax our effort to “strive ... for his holiness” (Heb 12.14), even as we are grateful for the fact that his grace continues to cleanse us when we fall short (cf. 1 John 1.7).
  - b. The process:
    - 1) Strategically provide what is needed (1.28):
      - a) Proclaim Christ – the first responsibility; but remember that this includes his teaching (cf. Matt 28.20), not just information *about* Jesus. But notice that the following words, both present participles, describe action that is concurrent with this proclamation.
      - b) Admonishing everyone (NIV).
        - (1) The verb is νοουθετέω (*noutheteō*), to “‘offer counsel and instruction’ for avoidance or cessation of inappropriate conduct, *instruct, admonish*, freq. in context of solicitous concern, Ac 20:31; Ro 15:14; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Th 5:12, 14; 2 Th 3:15” (Danker 2009, 243).
        - (2) “Admonish” is the preferred translation, but we should not understand it to refer exclusively to reproofing wrongdoers.
        - (3) As Garland observes, “According to Acts 20:31, Paul spent three years ‘admonishing’ the Ephesians. He did not spend that entire time upbraiding them, but instructing them (cf. Col. 3:16) [cf. Acts 19.9–10]. Admonition therefore involves encouraging, instructing, and prompting, as well as reproofing others when necessary. Note too that Paul did not believe that this task was his responsibility alone; it belonged to the entire community (see 3:16 again)” (Garland 1998, 135–136).
      - c) Teaching everyone, with all wisdom.
        - (1) People do not automatically learn; Christianity is a taught faith, an understanding that originates with Jesus (John 13.13; Matt 7.28–29; cf. Matt 10.24; 26.18; Mark 5.35; John 1.38; 3.2; 11.28; 20.16; etc.).
        - (2) Biblically, wisdom is not esoteric knowledge, but is better defined as being skilled in the correct ways of life (cf. the Hebrew word חָכְמָה, *hāk<sup>e</sup>māh*, especially as used in regard to the skills of Bezalel and others for building the tabernacle and crafting its furnishings in Exod 31.3, 6; 35.26, 31; 35; 36.1–2; cf. also Prov 8, esp. vv. 22–31; Jas 3.13–18).
    - 2) Purposefully protecting from what will harm us, something Paul did that would have been included in his admonishing and teaching (2.4).
  - c. The audience: “everyone,” literally “all people” (πάντα ἄνθρωπον, *panta anthrōpon*), a phrase that is emphatically repeated three times in verse 28.
    - 1) This emphasizes the gospel’s inclusiveness, cutting through all ethnic discrimination, sectarian exclusiveness, and intellectual hubris (Garland 1998, 124).

- 2) As Bruce comments, “There is no part of Christian teaching that is to be reserved for a spiritual elite. All the truth of God, for all the people of God” (Bruce 1984, 87).
13. In 2.2, Paul also says he seeks to strengthen the bonds of love that hold them together; to leave out love is to have a practice of faith that is barren and empty (cf. Garland 1998, 124–125).

*Stability Entails: Commitment to Understand and Share God’s Mystery (1.26; 2.2)*

14. We must first define “mystery.”
- As many Bible students know, “mystery” (μυστήριον, *mysterion*) as used in Scripture does not refer to a whodunit, puzzle, or something unintelligible.
  - Nor is Paul using it as it was used in the Colossians’ religious environment to refer to information about initiatory rites and symbols, things that were reserved only for the initiated (the mystery religions).
  - He is using it as it was used in his Jewish background, to refer to hidden things that God revealed to the wise; having been revealed, these things can now be understood (Matt 13.11, 17; Rom 16.25–26; 1 Cor 2.1, 7, 8–13) (cf. Garland 1998, 125, 128).
15. In Colossians 2.2–3, Paul specifically says the “mystery of God ... is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
16. In line with his emphasis on “everyone” (v. 28), Paul stresses that the mystery has been revealed to all the believers, including Gentiles (vv. 26–27); this makes it inclusive, open to anyone regardless of race, class, gender, intellect, past virtue, or age.

May 24, 2026

### Works Cited

- Bauer, Walter. 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG). 3rd edition. ed. Frederick William Danker. The University of Chicago Press.
- Bruce, F. F. 1984. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Danker, Frederick William, with Kathryn Krug. 2009. *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Garland, David E. 1998. *Colossians and Philemon*. The NIV Application Commentary. ed. Terry Muck. Zondervan Publishing House.
- Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds. 1989. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. United Bible Societies.
- Wright, N. T. 1986. *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

*Unless otherwise noted, all Bible translations are from the ESV.*